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(54) **FORMING ENHANCEMENT MODE
III-NITRIDE DEVICES**

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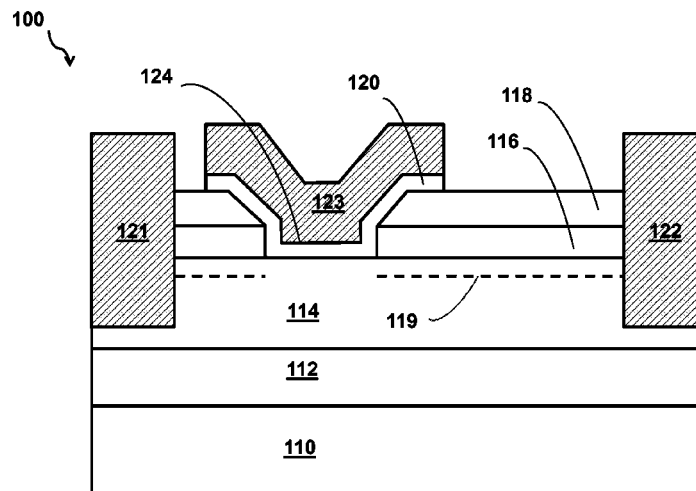
See application file for complete search history.

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ABSTRACT

A method of fabricating a III-N device includes forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate, a III-N barrier layer on the channel layer, an insulator layer on the barrier layer, and a trench in a first portion of the device. Forming the trench comprises removing the insulator layer and a part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, such that a remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device has a thickness away from a top surface of the channel layer, the thickness being within a predetermined thickness range, annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, and removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device.

39 Claims, 21 Drawing Sheets



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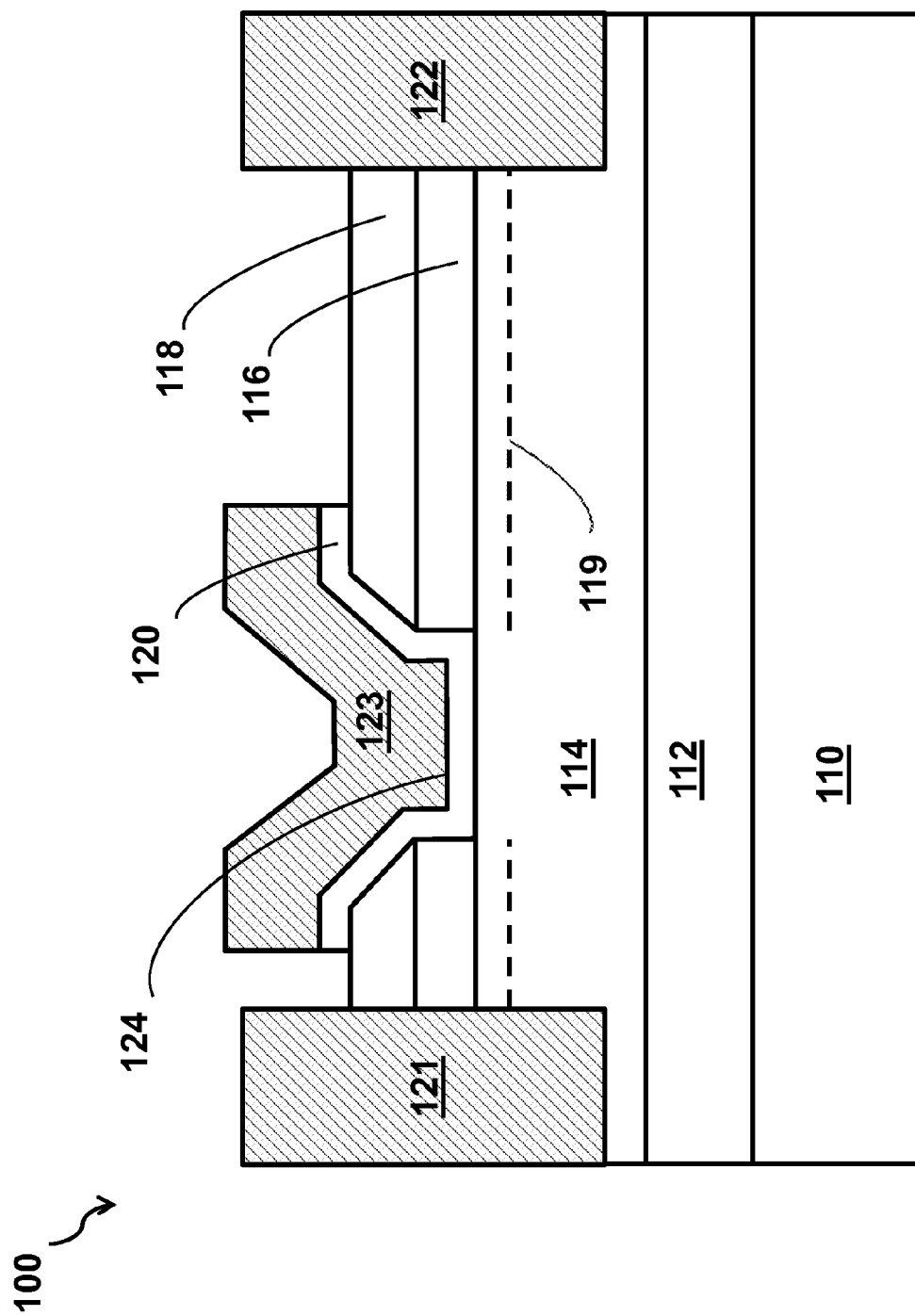


FIG. 1

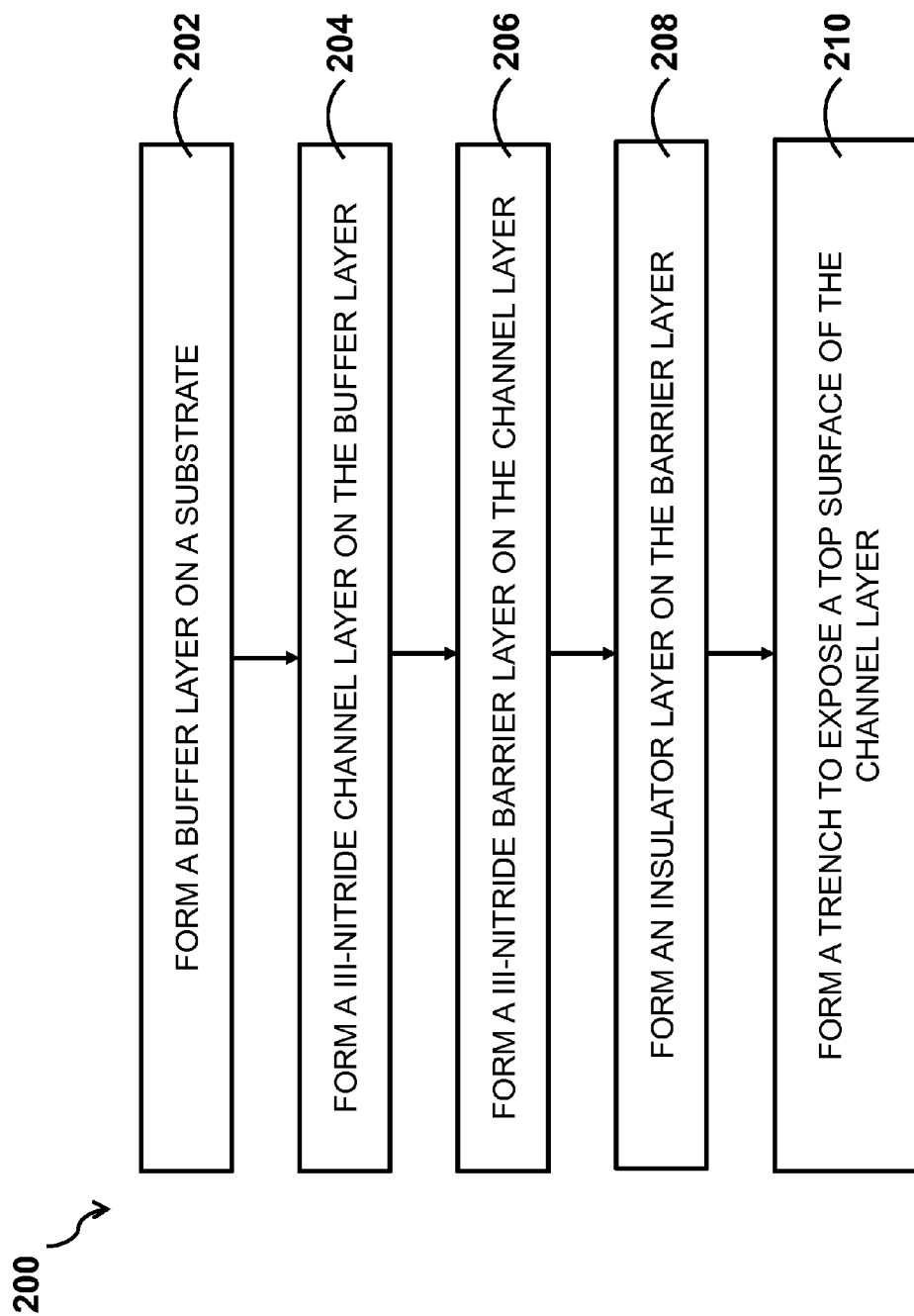


FIG. 2A

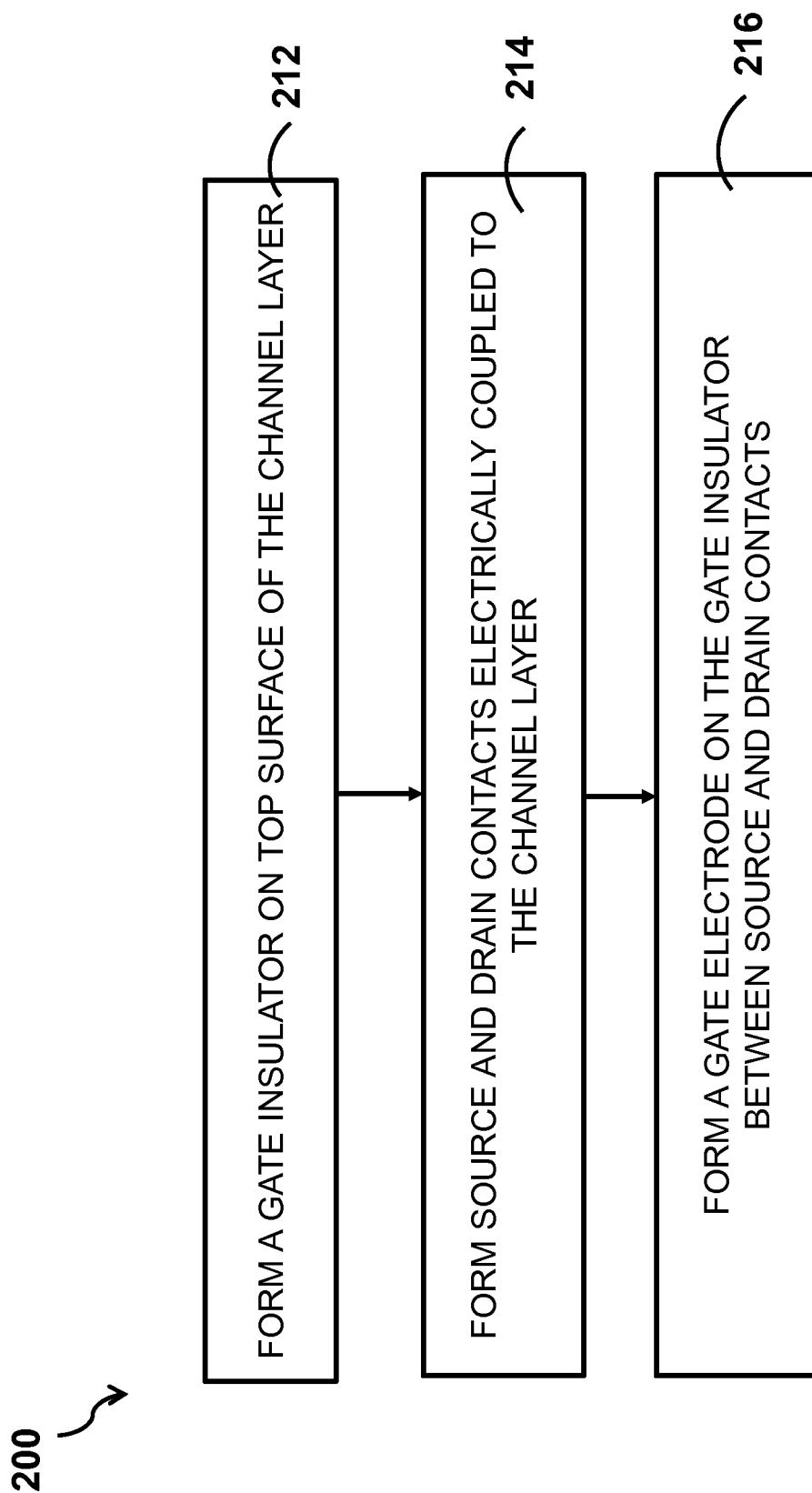
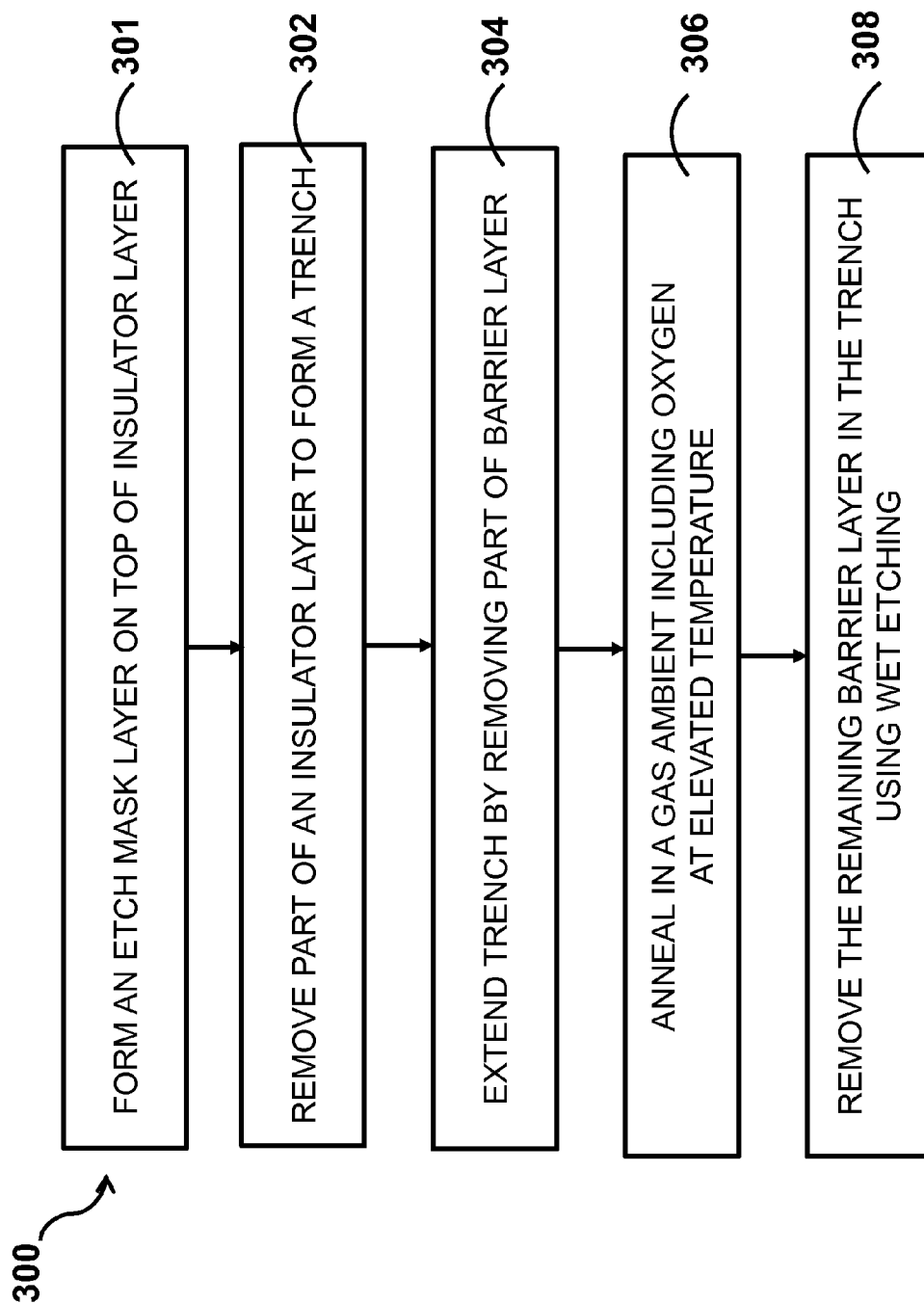


FIG. 2B

**FIG. 3A**

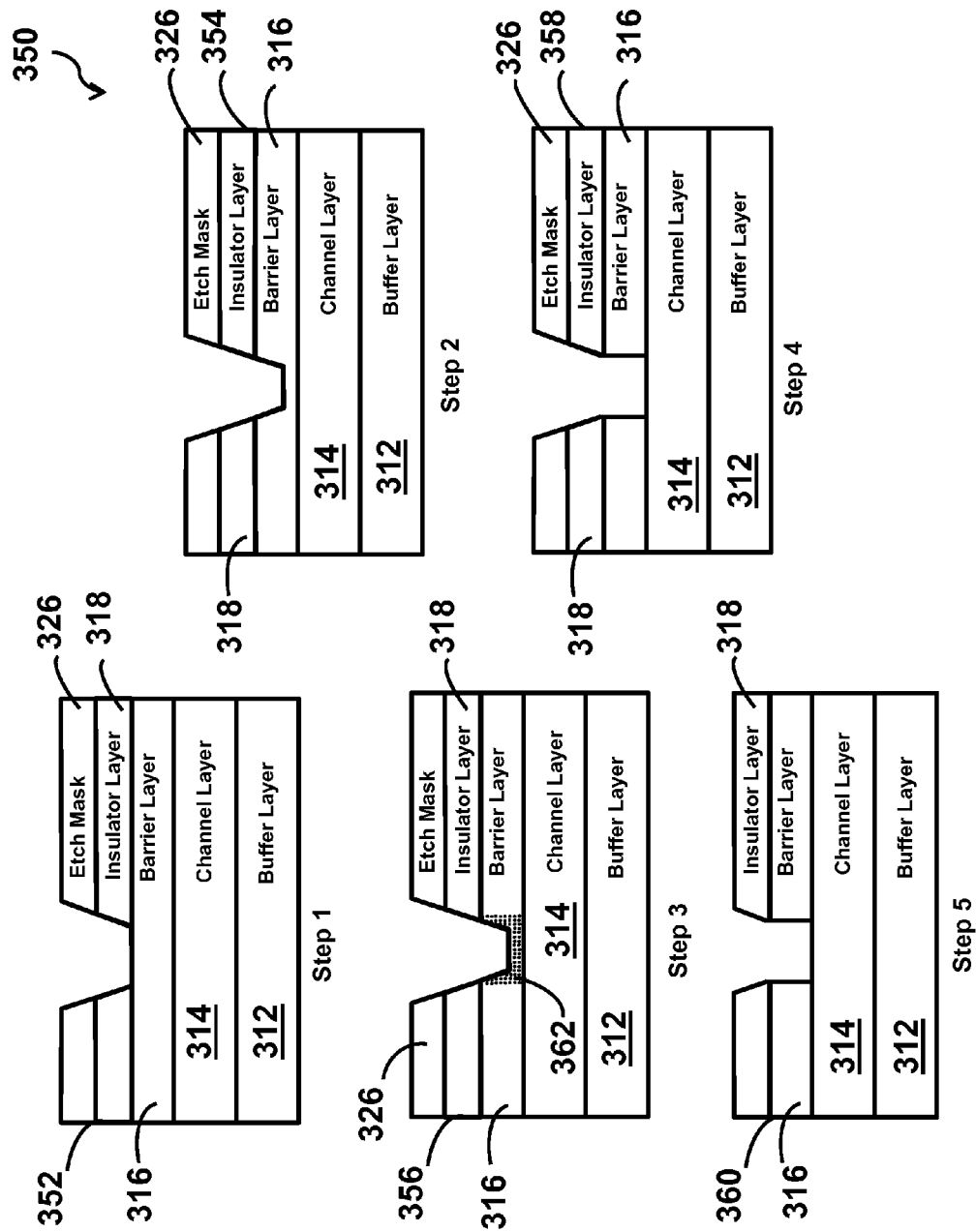


FIG. 3B

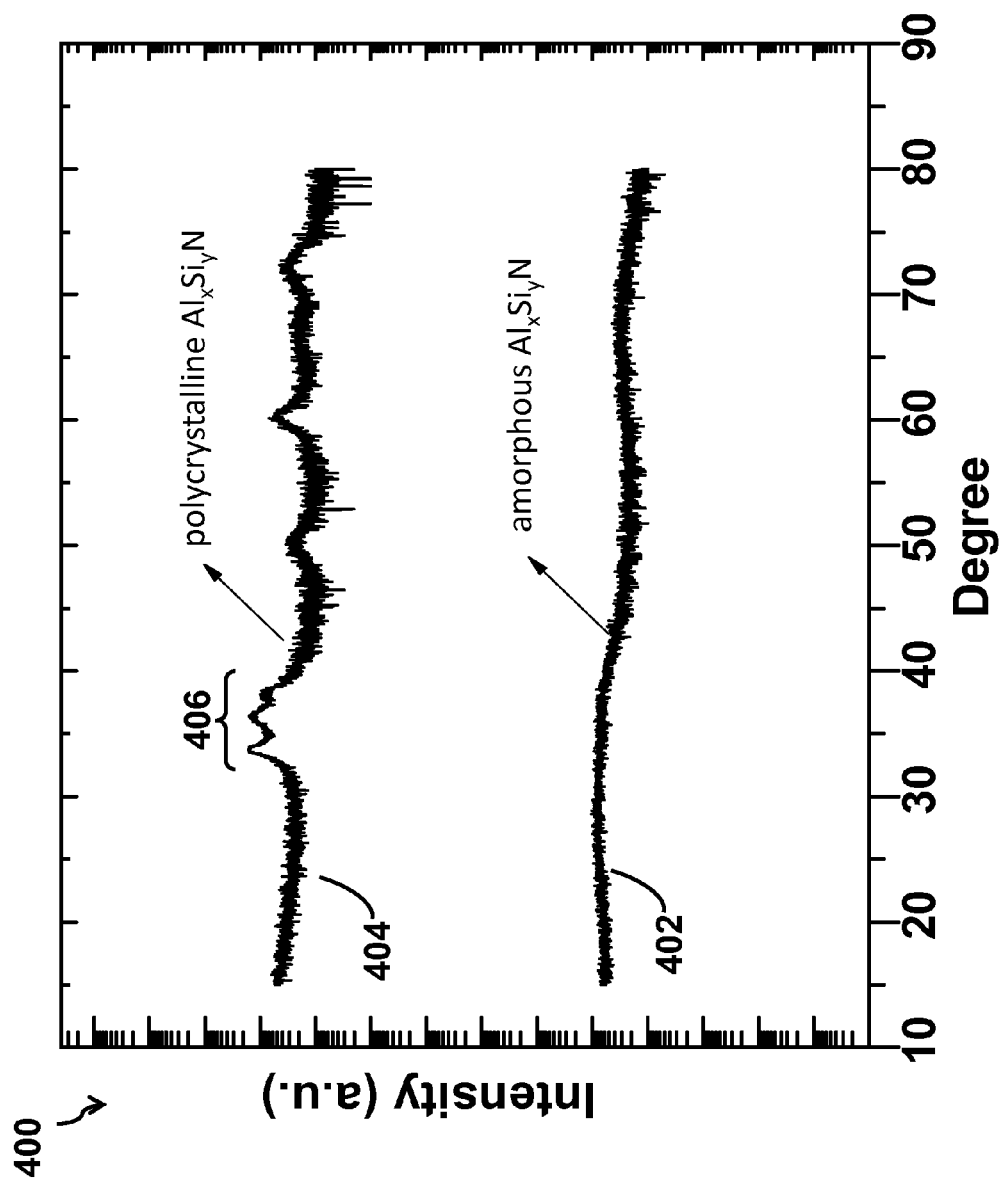


FIG. 4

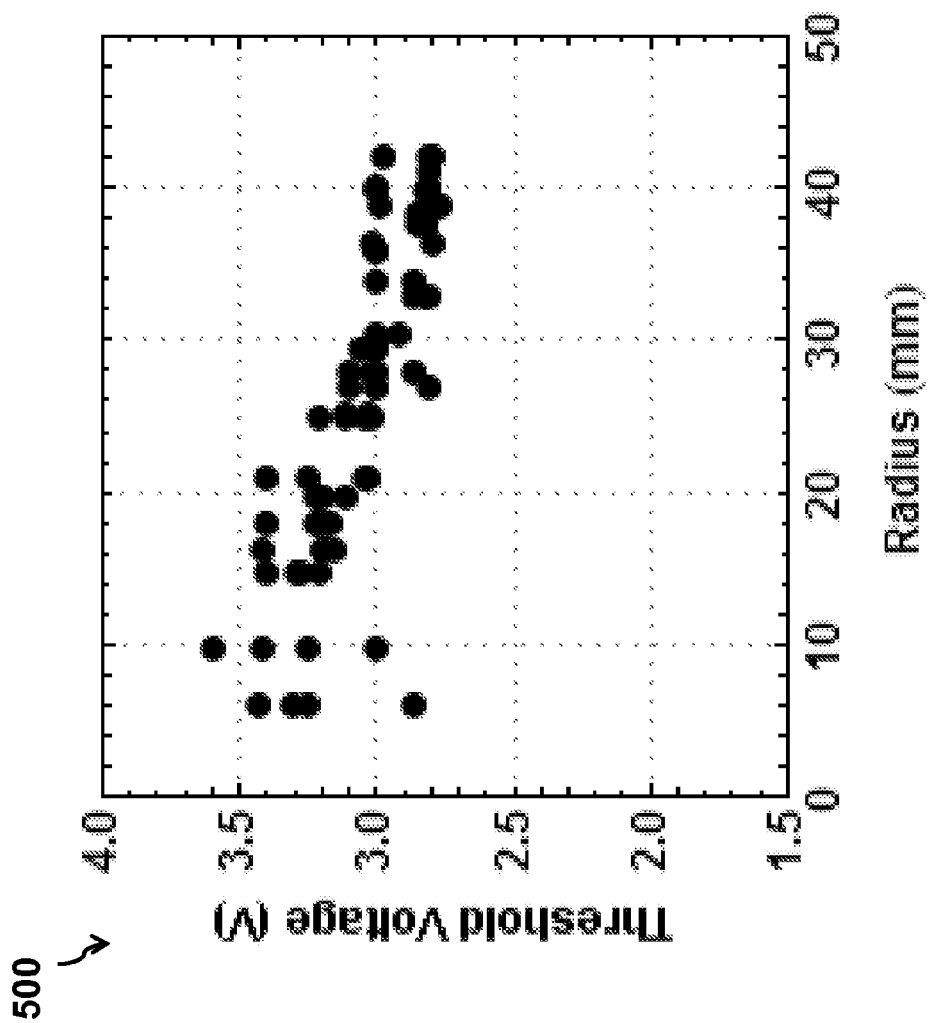


FIG. 5

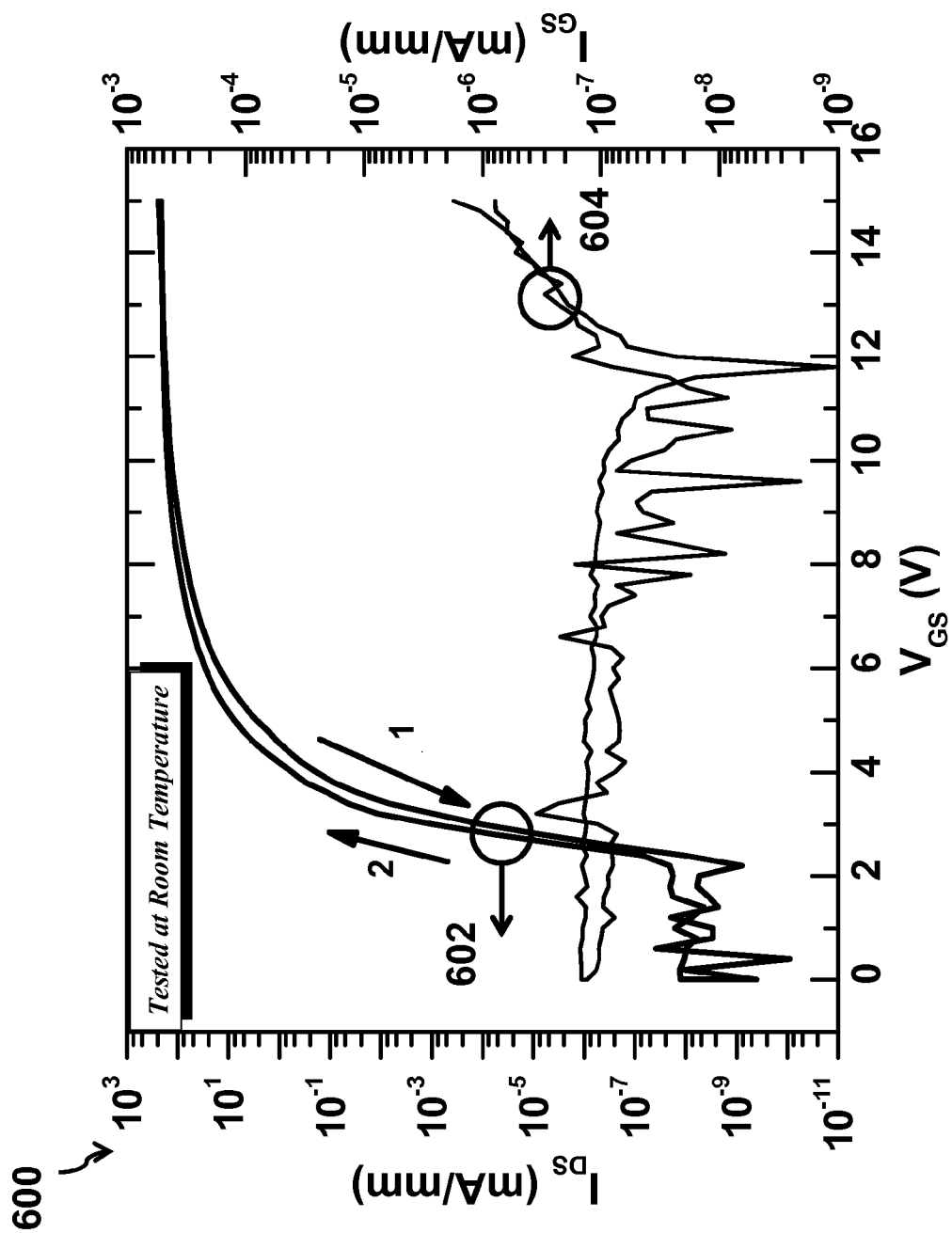


FIG. 6

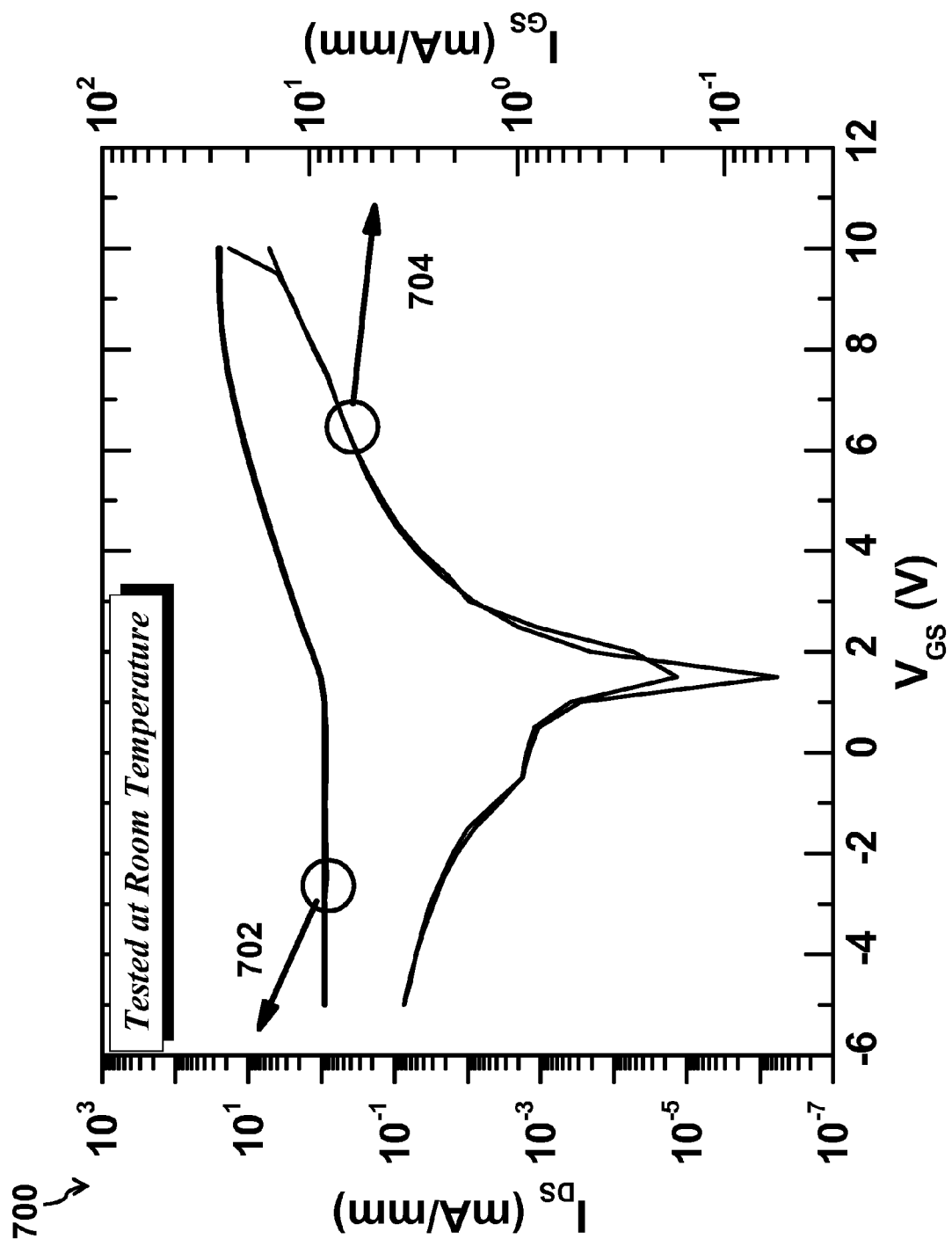


FIG. 7

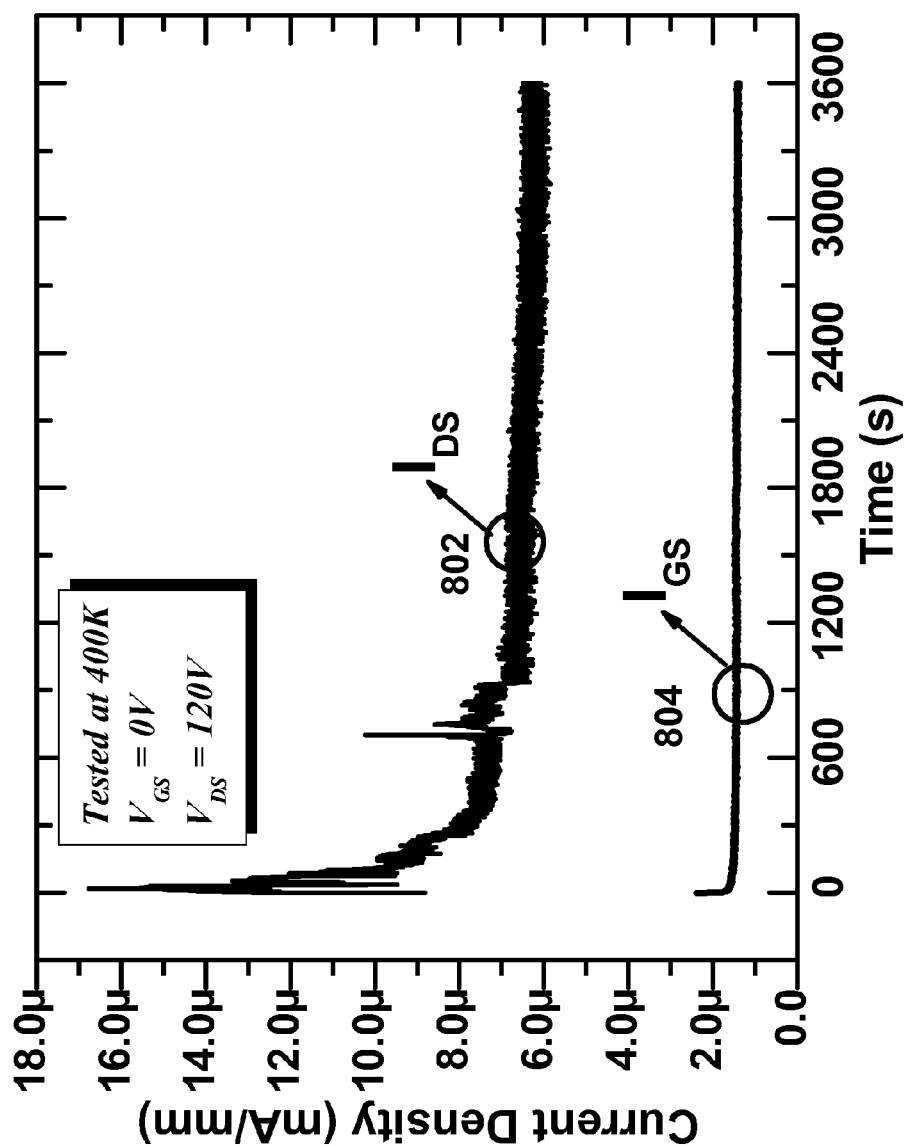


FIG. 8

800 ↗

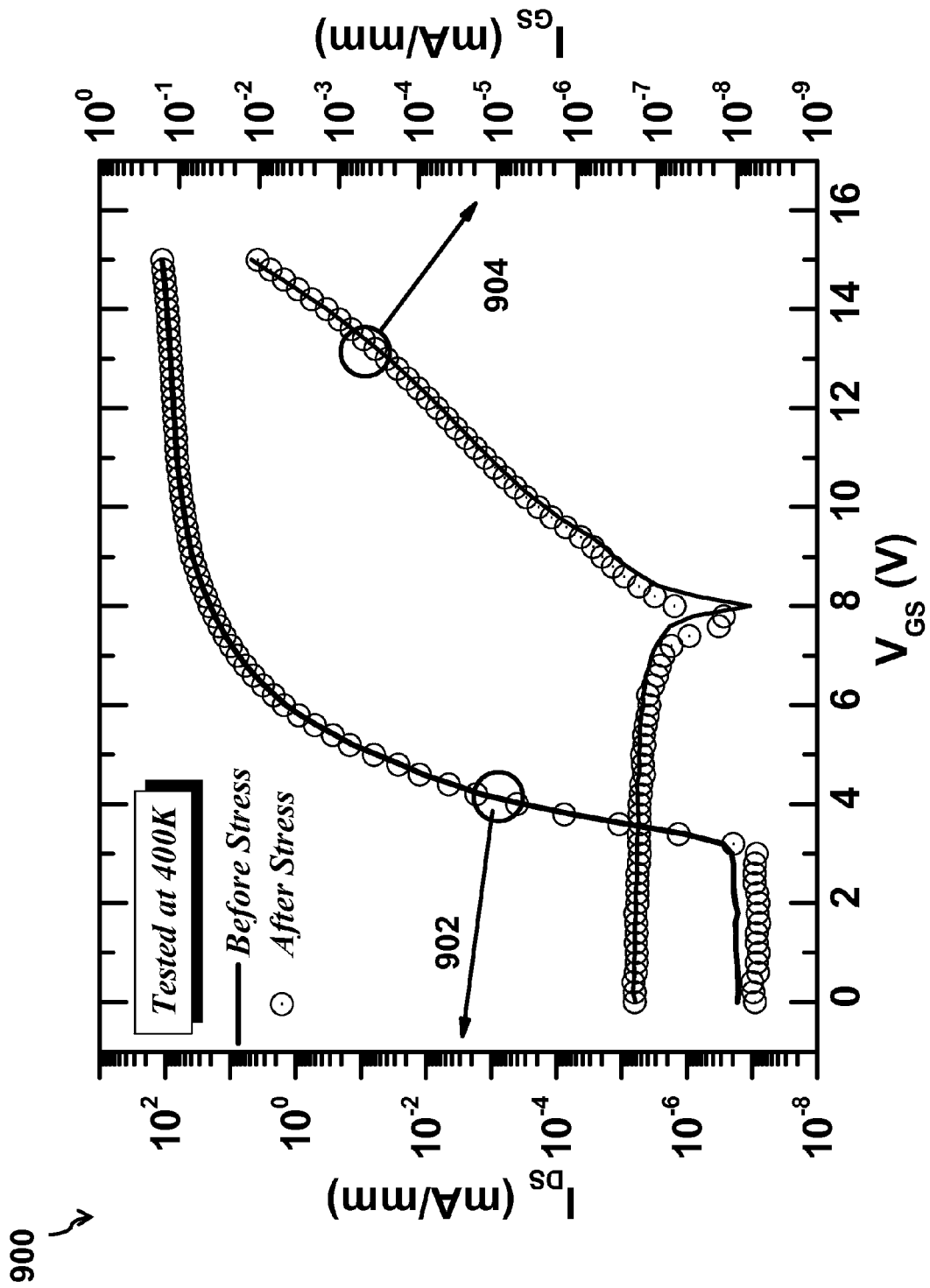


FIG. 9

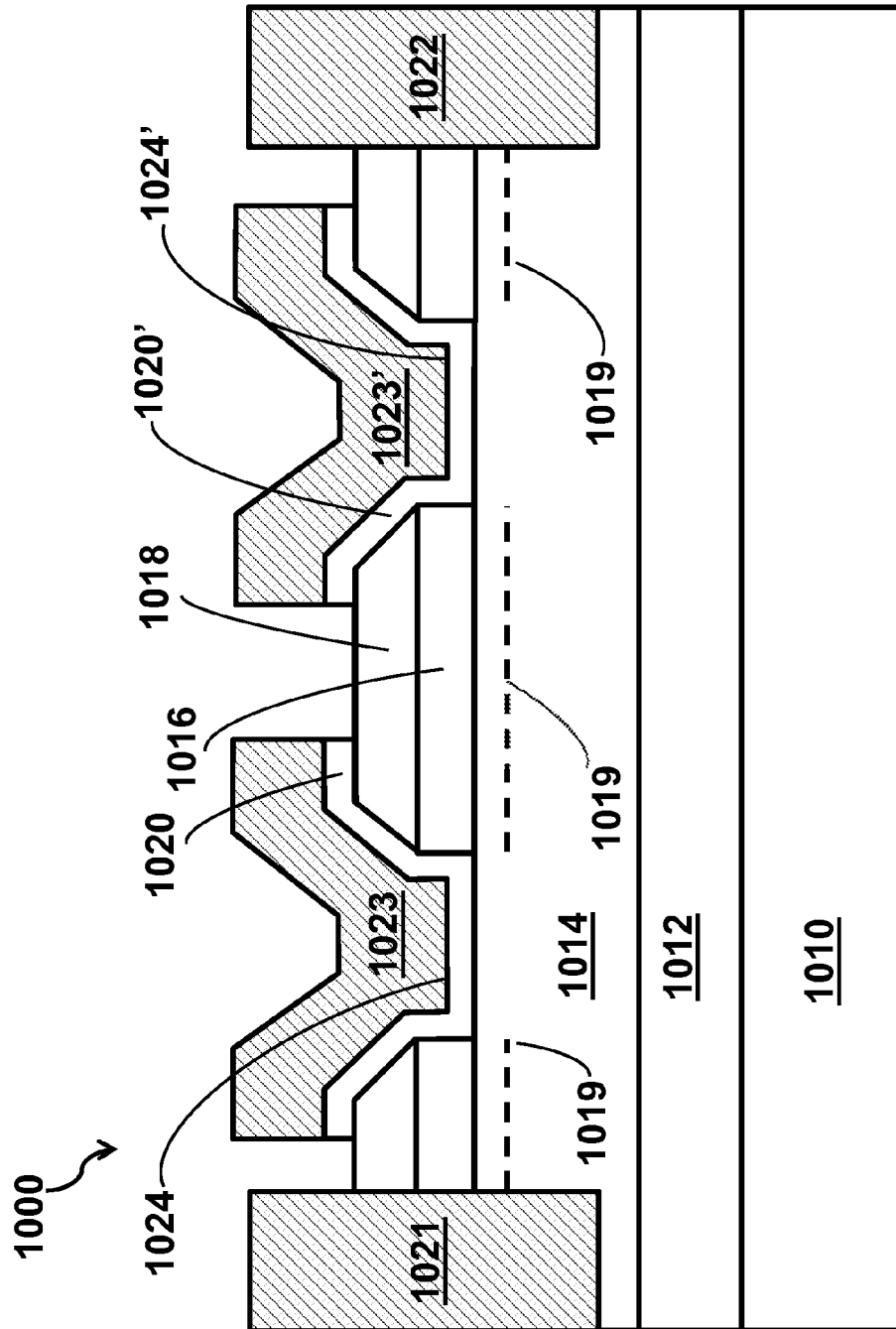


FIG. 10

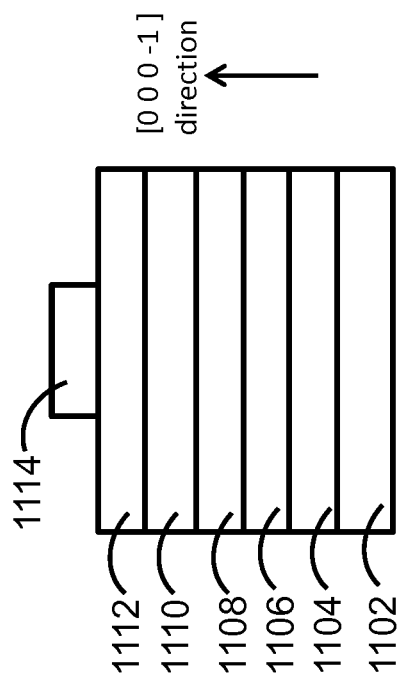


FIG. 11B

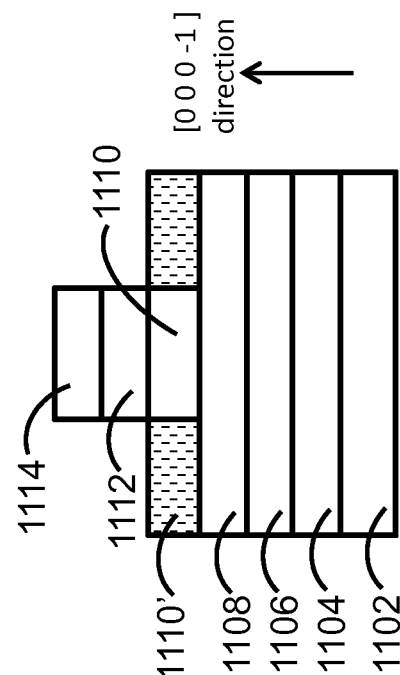


FIG. 11D

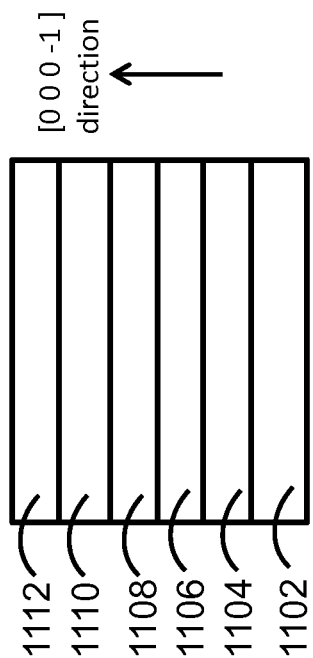


FIG. 11A

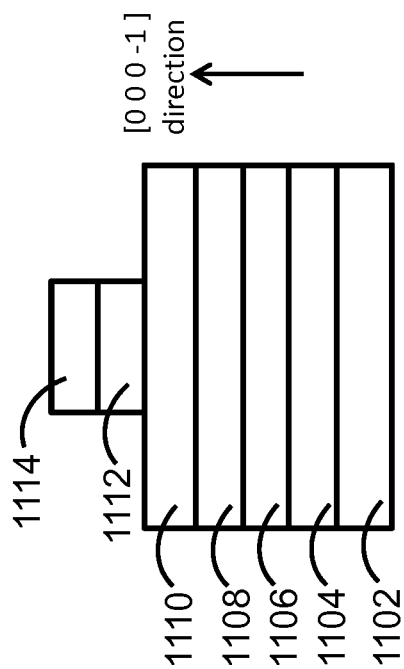


FIG. 11C

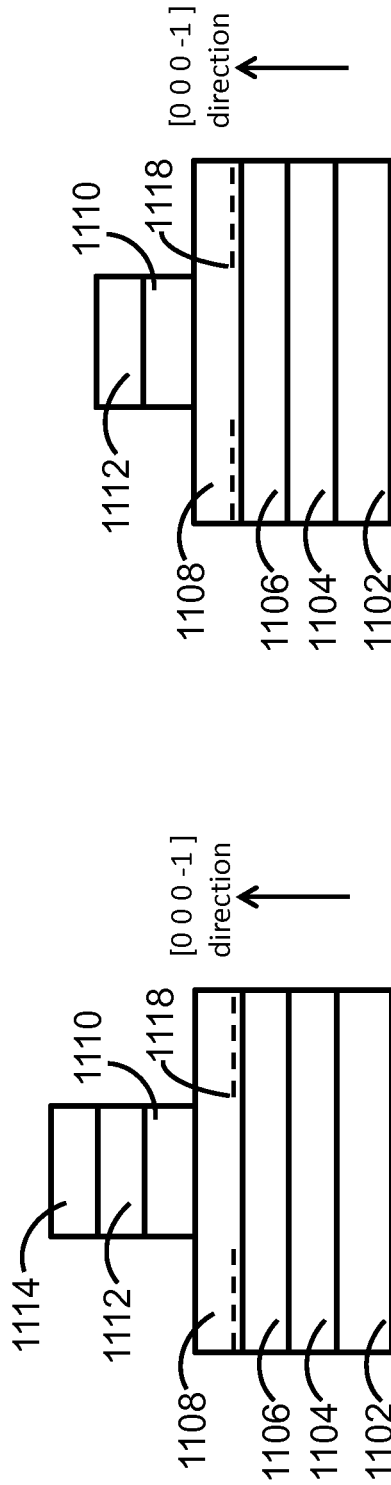


FIG. 11E

FIG. 11F

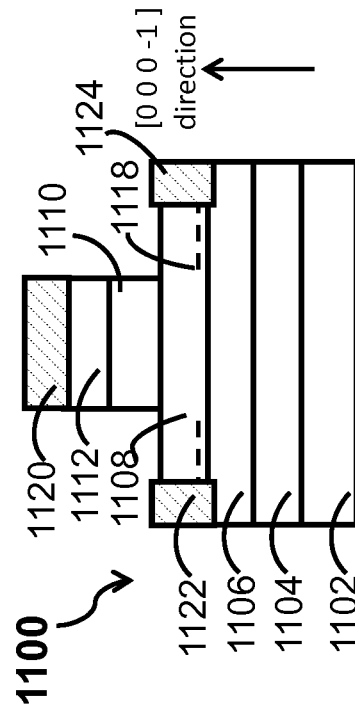


FIG. 11G

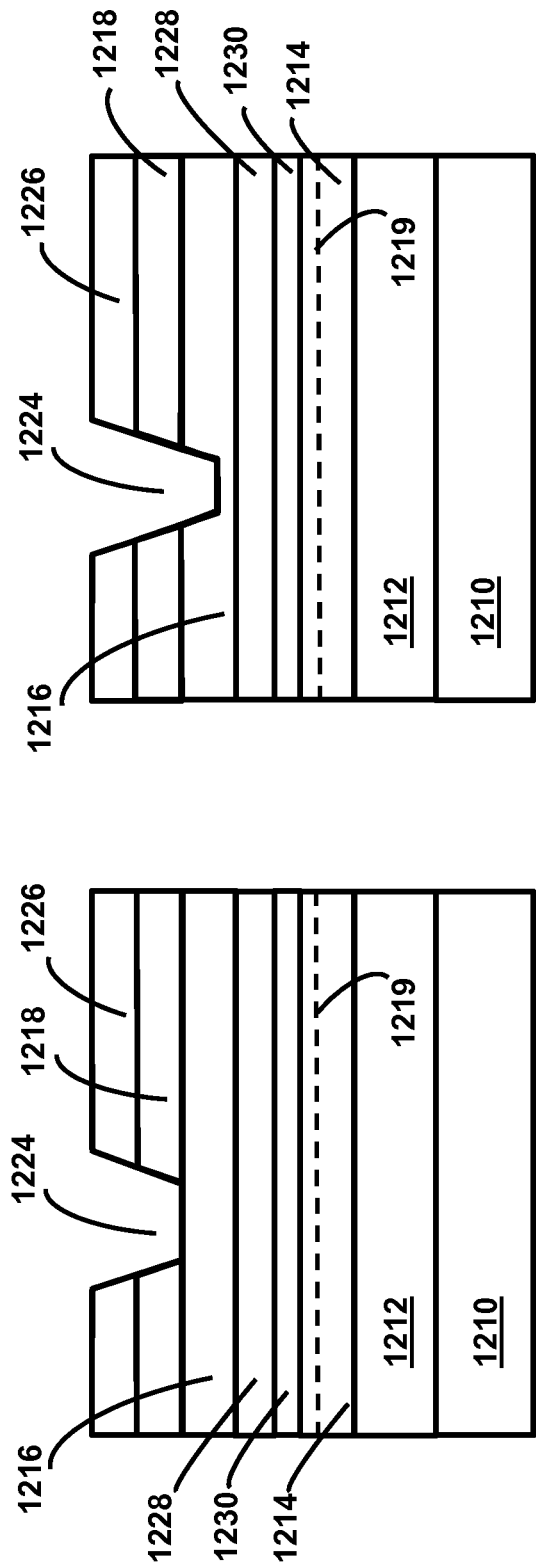


FIG. 12B

FIG. 12A

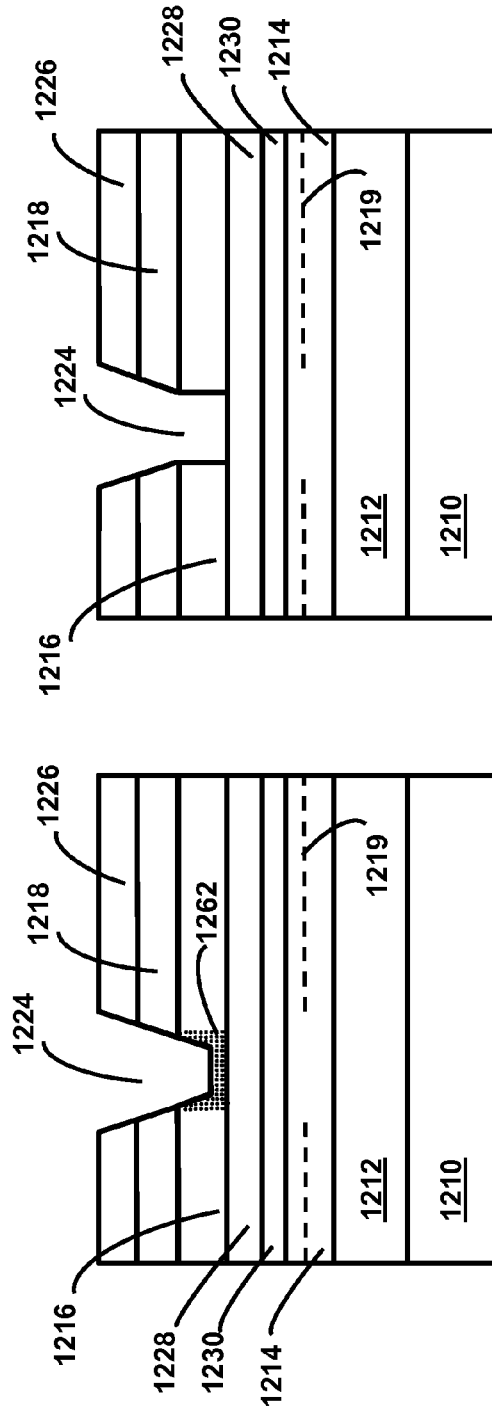


FIG. 12D

FIG. 12C

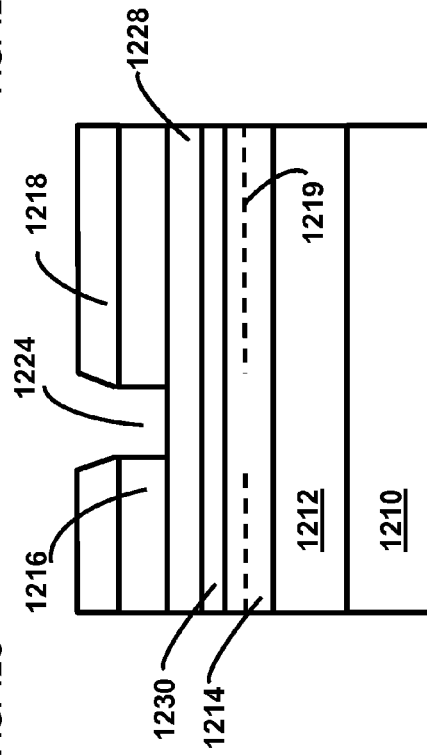


FIG. 12E

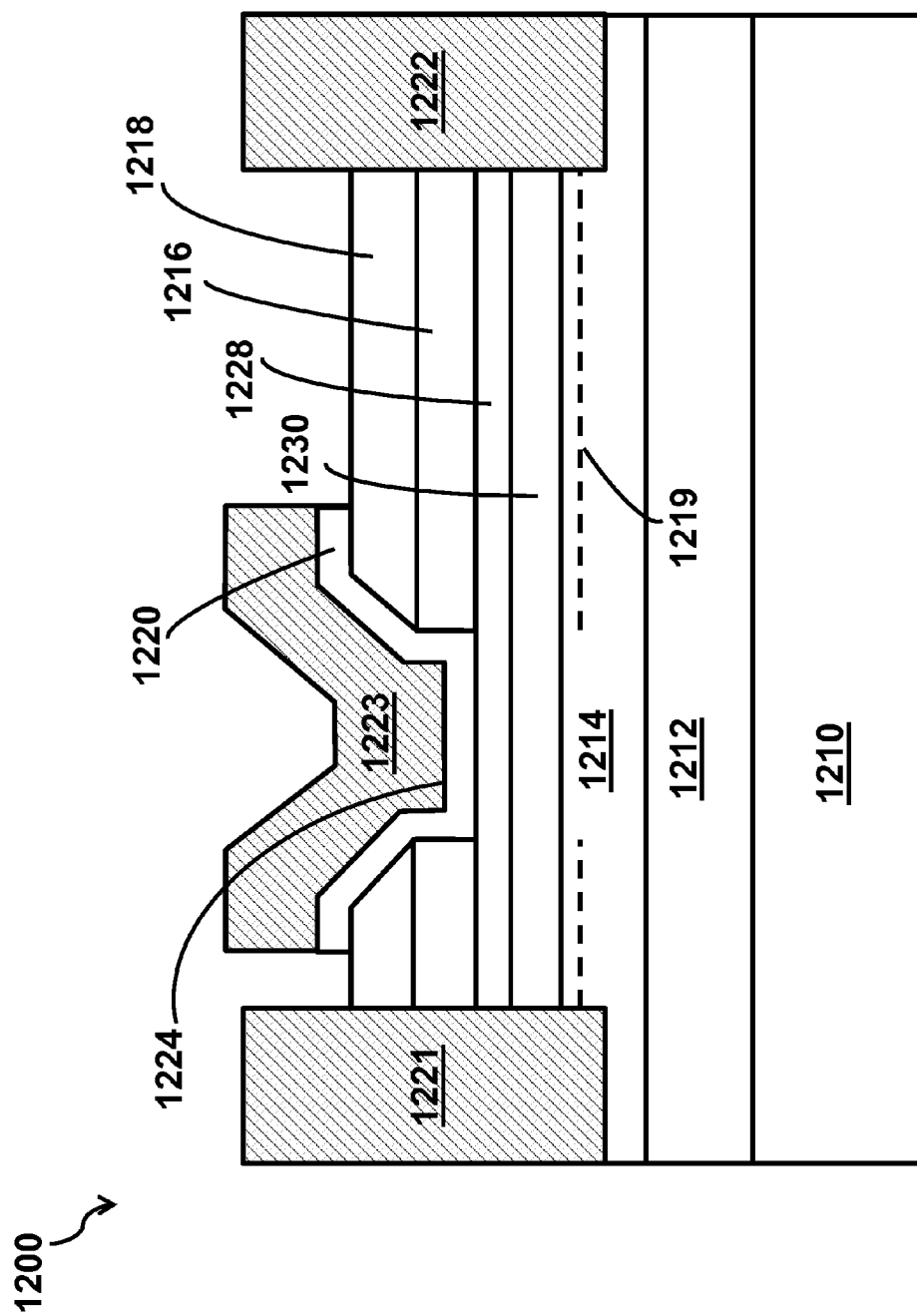


FIG. 12F

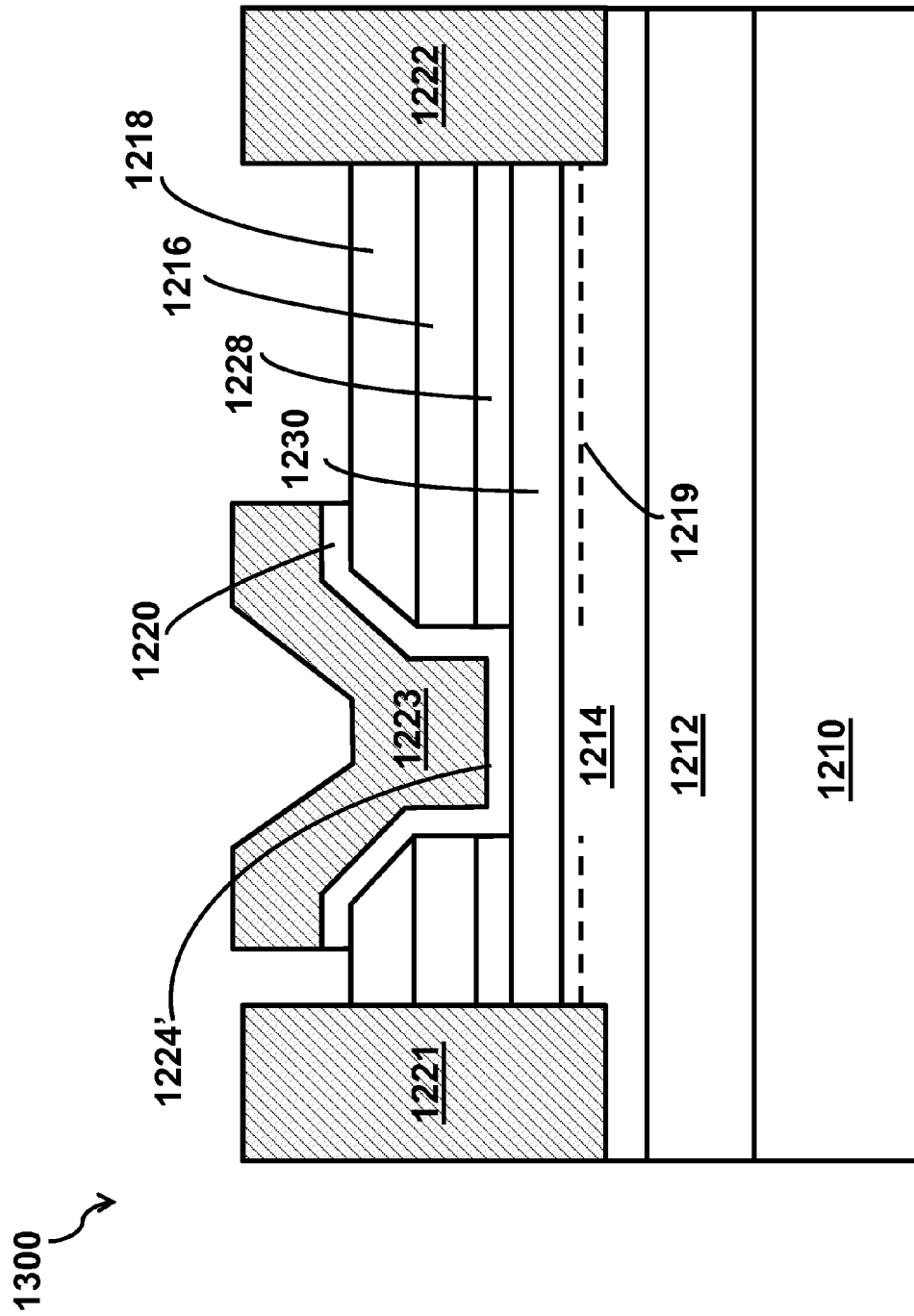


FIG. 13

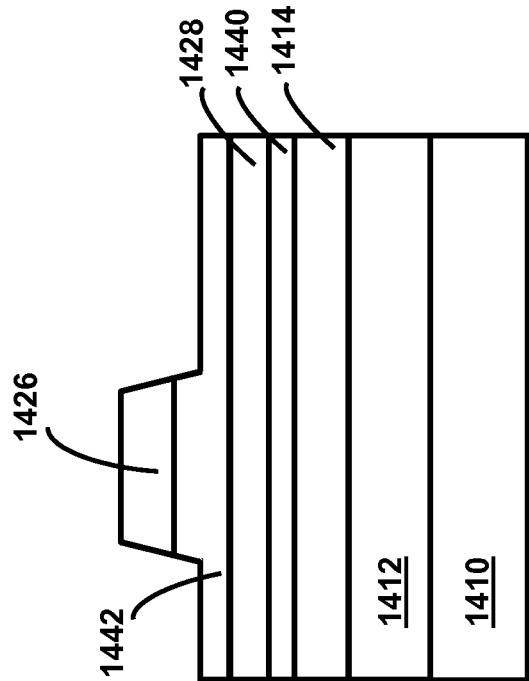


FIG. 14A

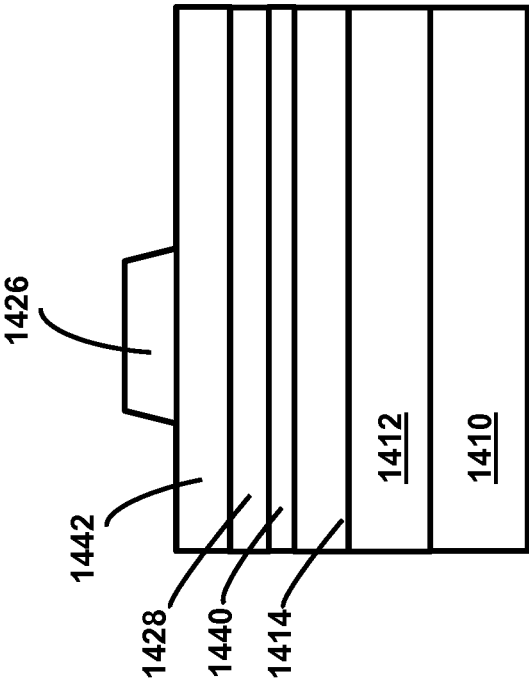


FIG. 14B

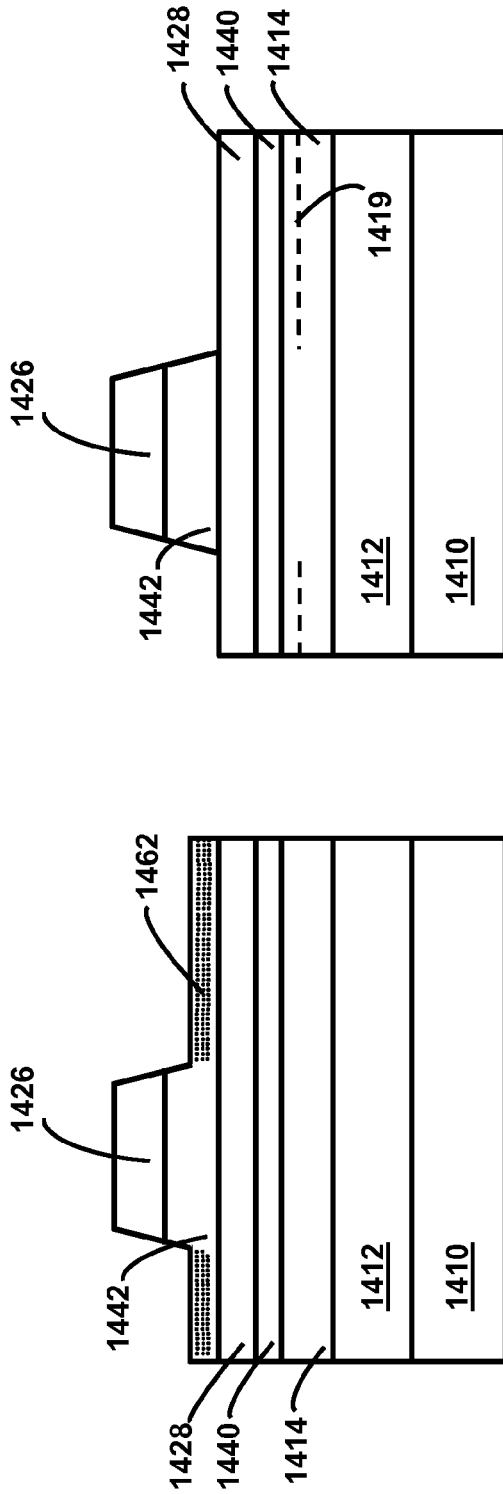


FIG. 14C

FIG. 14D

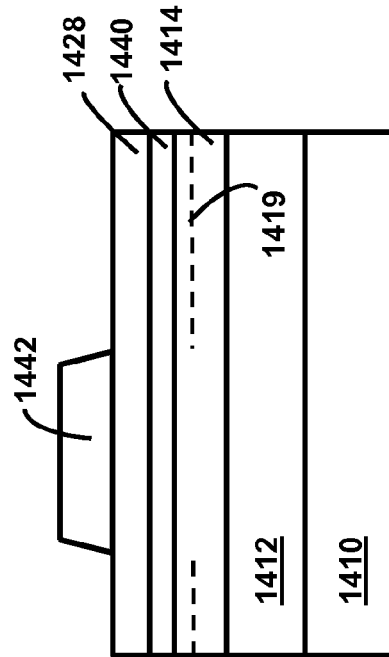


FIG. 14E

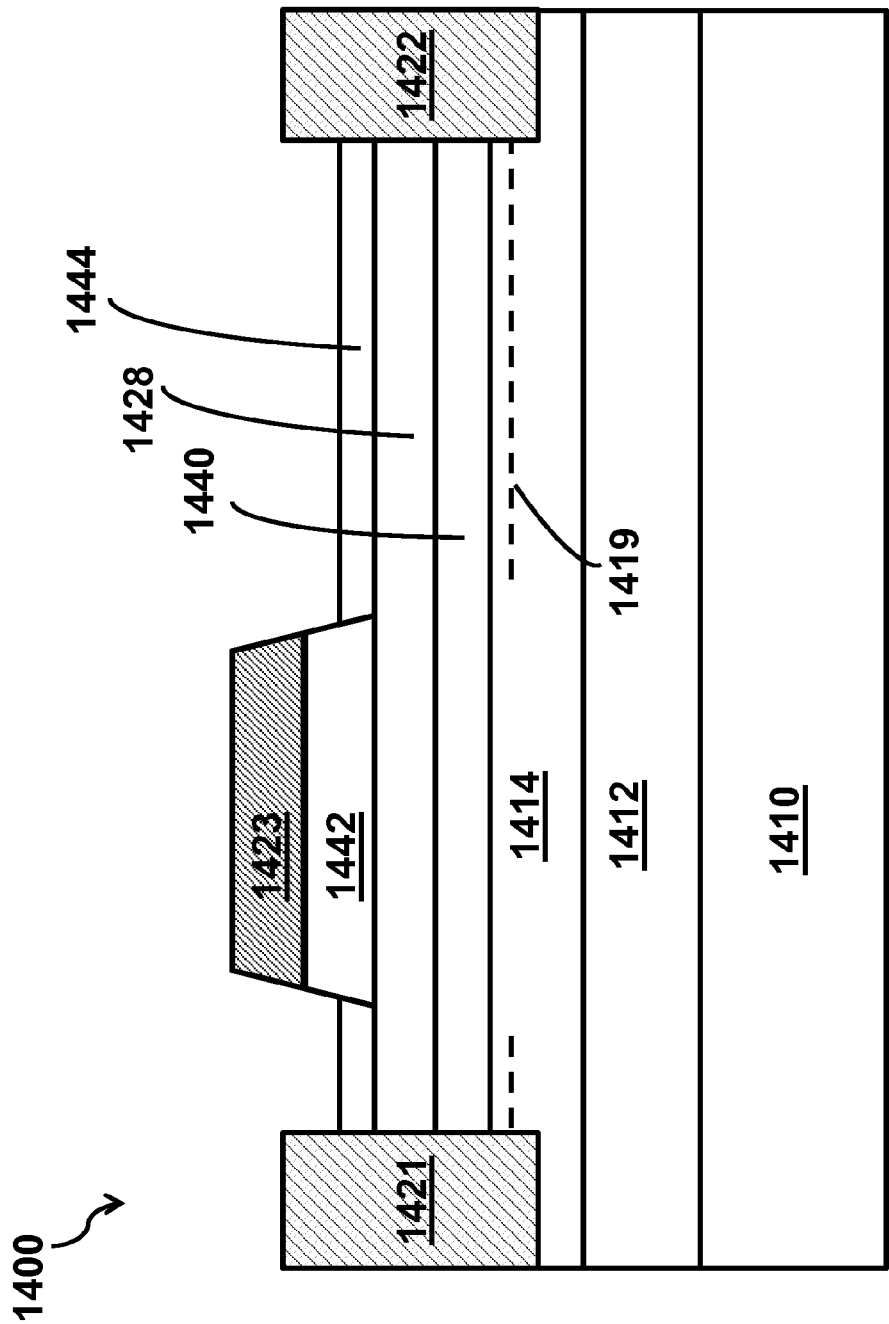


FIG. 14F

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FORMING ENHANCEMENT MODE III-NITRIDE DEVICES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/027,126, filed on Jul. 21, 2014. The disclosure of the prior application is considered part of and is incorporated by reference in the disclosure of this application.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

This invention was made with Government support awarded by ARPA-E [Award #DE-AR0000212]. The Government has certain rights in this invention, including the right to revoke or modify the license to manufacture if the recipient is unable to expeditiously realize practical applications.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This specification relates to semiconductor electronic devices, specifically III-Nitride (III-N) semiconductor devices.

BACKGROUND

Most power semiconductor devices, e.g., high-voltage P-I-N diodes, and power transistors, e.g., power metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistors (MOSFETs) and Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistors (IGBTs), have been typically fabricated with silicon (Si) semiconductor materials. Silicon carbide (SiC) power devices have also been used. III-N devices are attractive semiconductor devices to carry large currents and support high voltages, and provide very low on resistance, high voltage operation, and fast switching times.

Some III-N devices, e.g., high electron mobility transistors (HEMTs) and bidirectional switches (also known as four quadrant switches or FQSSs), may be depletion-mode (or D-mode) or normally-on devices, e.g., devices with a negative threshold voltage. That is, the devices are in the ON state unless a sufficiently negative voltage is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source or power electrode. In many applications, in particular in power switching circuits, it is desirable to utilize enhancement-mode (or E-mode) devices, e.g., devices with a positive threshold voltage, as this can simplify the form of the signals applied by a gate-drive circuit to the device and can prevent accidental turn on of the device in case of device or circuit failure. Reliable fabrication and manufacturing of high-voltage III-N E-mode devices has proven to be very difficult. In some cases, a high-voltage III-N D-mode device and a low-voltage silicon-based E-mode device are combined together to form a hybrid device, which may achieve the same or similar output characteristics as a single high-voltage III-N E-mode device.

SUMMARY

In a first aspect, a method for fabricating a III-N device includes forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate, forming a III-N barrier layer on the channel layer, forming an insulator layer on the barrier layer, and forming a trench in a first portion of the device. Forming the trench can comprise removing the insulator layer and a part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, such that a remaining portion of

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the barrier layer in the first portion of the device has a thickness away from a top surface of the channel layer, the thickness being within a predetermined range. Forming the trench may further include annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, and removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device.

In a second aspect, a method of fabricating a device includes providing a second III-N layer on a first III-N layer, where the second layer comprises aluminum as a group-III element and the first III-N layer comprises gallium or indium but not aluminum as a group-III element, providing an insulator layer on the second III-N layer, and forming a trench in a first portion of the device. Forming the trench can comprise removing the insulator layer to expose a portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device, annealing the device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device, and removing the oxidized exposed portion of the second III-N layer and exposing a top surface of the first III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

In a third aspect, a III-N device includes a III-N material structure with a III-N channel layer and a III-N barrier layer, a source contact and a drain contact electrically coupled to the channel layer, an insulator layer on the III-N material structure, and a gate insulator at least partially in a trench, and also on a top surface of the channel layer. The trench extends through the insulator layer and into the III-N material structure, with the portion of the trench that extends into the III-N material structure having first sidewalls that are substantially more vertical than second sidewalls of the portion of the trench that is through the insulator layer. The device further includes a gate electrode deposited conformally on top of the gate insulator and at least partially in the trench, where the gate electrode is positioned between the source and drain contacts.

In a fourth aspect, a transistor includes a semiconductor material structure with a conductive channel, a source contact and a drain contact which are electrically coupled to the conductive channel, and an insulator layer on the semiconductor material structure. The transistor further includes a gate insulator on the semiconductor material structure, where the gate insulator includes an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film with $y/x < 1/3$, and a gate electrode on top of the gate insulator and position between the source and drain contacts.

In a fifth aspect, a method of fabricating a nitrogen polar III-N device includes providing a III-N material structure with a second III-N layer on a first III-N layer, the second III-N layer comprising aluminum as a group-III element and the first III-N layer comprising gallium or indium but not aluminum as a group-III element, providing a masking layer on an N-face of the second III-N layer in a second portion of the device but not in a first portion of the device, such that the second III-N layer is exposed in the first portion but not the second portion of the device, annealing the device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device; and removing the oxidized exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device to expose a top surface of the first III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

In a sixth aspect, a method for fabricating a III-N device includes forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate, forming a second III-N barrier layer on the channel layer, forming a III-N etch stop layer on the second III-N barrier layer, form-

ing a first III-N barrier layer on the III-N etch stop layer, forming an insulator layer on the first III-N barrier layer, and forming a trench in a first portion of the device. Forming the trench includes removing the insulator layer in the first portion of the device, wherein a portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device has a thickness away from a top surface of the channel layer, the thickness being within a predetermined thickness range, annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device, and removing the oxidized portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device.

In a seventh aspect, a method of forming a III-N device includes forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate, forming a III-N barrier layer on the channel layer, forming a III-N etch stop layer on the III-N barrier layer, forming a p-type III-N layer on the III-N etch stop layer, forming a mask layer on the p-type III-N layer in a first portion of the device, and forming a trench in a second portion of the device. Forming the trench includes annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the p-type III-N layer in the first portion of the device and removing the oxidized portion of the p-type III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

The foregoing and other embodiments can each optionally include one or more of the following features, alone or in combination. A portion of the trench that is through the barrier layer can include vertical sidewalls, and a portion of the trench that is through the insulator layer can include slanted sidewalls. Forming the trench can include exposing the top surface of the channel layer in the first portion of the device. Removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device can include wet etching the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer. Removing the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device can include dry etching the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device. Wet etching can include chemically etching the III-N device in an alkaline solution. Removing the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device can include removing the insulator layer in the first portion of the device by dry etching in a first gas ambient to expose a second top surface of the barrier layer, as well as removing the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device by dry etching in a second gas ambient which is different from the first gas ambient. The insulator layer can include a silicon nitride layer and the barrier layer can include an aluminum gallium nitride ($\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$) layer, wherein the second gas ambient can include SF_6 and the third gas ambient includes Cl_2 .

The barrier layer can include an Al-based III-N layer that can be oxidized by the annealing, and the channel layer can include a III-N layer without Aluminum (Al) that is resistant to being oxidized during the annealing. The predetermined thickness range can be from about 3 nm to 10 nm. The elevated temperature can be between 300° C. and 700° C. Forming an insulator layer can include forming a first silicon nitride layer by metal organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD) as the insulator layer, and fabricating the III-N device can further include forming a second silicon nitride layer by plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) as an etch mask layer before forming the trench, as well as removing the etch mask layer from the insulator layer by wet etching in an acid solution after removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device. Fabricating the III-N device can also include forming

a gate insulator at least partially in the trench, wherein the gate insulator is formed on the top surface of the channel layer in the first portion of the device. Forming the gate insulator can include depositing an amorphous aluminum silicon nitride ($\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$) film in the trench. A thickness of the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can be between 1 nm and 60 nm. A ratio of the silicon fractional composition to the Al fractional composition y/x in the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film is less than $1/3$. Depositing the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can include forming the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film at a growth or deposition temperature higher than 500° C. Fabricating the III-N device can include forming source and drain contacts electrically coupled to the channel layer, and forming a gate electrode on the gate insulator at least partially in the trench between the source and drain contacts. Forming the III-N barrier layer can include forming the III-N barrier layer with a higher bandgap than the channel layer, such that a conductive channel is induced in the channel layer, and forming the source and drain contacts can include forming respective ohmic contacts for the source and drain contacts that are electrically coupled to the conductive channel.

When fabricating a device, oxidizing the exposed portion of the second III-N layer can cause the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device to be oxidized all the way to an interface between the second III-N layer and the first III-N layer but does not cause any of the first III-N layer to be oxidized. Fabricating a device can also include forming an electrode in the trench. A second insulator layer can be formed prior to forming the electrode, wherein the second insulator layer is between the electrode and the top surface of the first III-N layer in the trench. The electrode can be a gate electrode, a conductive channel can be induced adjacent to an interface between the first and second III-N layers due to a compositional difference between the first and second III-N layers, and fabricating a device can further include forming a source and drain electrode, the source and drain electrodes being on opposite sides of the gate electrode and being electrically coupled to the conductive channel. The conductive channel can be depleted of mobile charge below the trench when 0V is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source electrode, but becomes populated with mobile charge when a sufficiently positive voltage is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source electrode. The electrode can include an extending portion which extends over the insulator layer towards the drain electrode. The second insulator layer can include an extending portion that is between the extending portion of the electrode and the insulator layer. Fabricating a device can also include partially removing the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device after the removing of the insulator layer in the first portion of the device but prior to the annealing of the device, causing a remaining portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device to have a first thickness which is less than a second thickness of portions of the second III-N layer that are on opposite sides of the trench. The first thickness can be between 3 nm and 10 nm.

In the III-N device, the first sidewalls of the trench can be vertical and the second sidewalls of the trench can be slanted. The gate electrode can include extending portions that are outside the trench and extend towards but are separated from the source and drain contacts, respectively. The barrier layer can have a larger bandgap than the channel layer, such that a conductive channel is induced in the channel layer. The source and drain contacts can form respective ohmic contacts that are electrically coupled to the conductive channel. The conductive channel can be discontinuous in a region of the channel layer beneath the trench when 0V is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source contact, but is continuous

when a voltage greater than a threshold voltage of the device is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source contact, the threshold voltage being greater than 0V. The III-N device can function as an enhancement-mode field effect transistor having the threshold voltage of more than 2V and a threshold voltage hysteresis of less than 0.5V. The gate insulator can include an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film. A thickness of the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can be between 1 nm and 60 nm. The III-N channel layer can include a III-N layer without Aluminum (Al) and the III-N barrier layer can include an Al-based III-N layer.

In the transistor, a thickness of the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can be between about 1 nm and 60 nm. The semiconductor material structure can include a III-N channel layer and a III-N barrier layer on the III-N channel layer, and wherein the III-N barrier layer has a larger bandgap than the III-N channel layer, such that the conductive channel is induced in the III-N channel layer near an interface between the III-N channel layer and the III-N barrier layer. At room temperature, a threshold voltage of the transistor can be more than 2 V and a threshold voltage hysteresis can be less than 0.5 V.

When fabricating a nitrogen polar III-N device, the top surface of the first III-N layer can be an N-face of the first III-N layer. Fabricating a nitrogen polar III-N device can also include providing a third III-N layer on an opposite side of the first III-N layer from the second III-N layer, wherein a compositional difference between the first III-N layer and the third III-N layer causes a conductive channel to be induced in the first III-N layer adjacent to an interface between the first and third III-N layers. Additionally, fabricating a nitrogen polar III-N device can include forming a gate electrode over the second portion of the device and forming a source contact electrically coupled to the conductive channel in the first portion of the device, wherein the second III-N layer is sufficiently thick to ensure that the conductive channel is depleted of mobile charge in the second portion of the device when 0V is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source contact. Prior to forming the gate electrode, the insulator layer can be removed from the second portion of the device.

Fabricating a III-N device can further include extending the trench into the first III-N barrier layer prior to the annealing of the III-N device. The extending of the trench into the first III-N barrier layer can include etching part way through the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device. The III-N etch stop layer can include a III-N layer without Aluminum (Al), and the first III-N barrier layer can include an Al-based III-N layer.

As used herein, the terms III-Nitride or III-N materials, layers, devices, etc., refer to a material or device comprised of a compound semiconductor material according to the stoichiometric formula $\text{B}_w\text{Al}_x\text{In}_y\text{Ga}_z\text{N}$, where $w+x+y+z$ is about 1 with $0 \leq w \leq 1$, $0 \leq x \leq 1$, $0 \leq y \leq 1$, and $0 \leq z \leq 1$. III-N materials, layers, or devices, can be formed or prepared by either directly growing on a suitable substrate (e.g., by metal organic chemical vapor deposition), or growing on a suitable substrate, detaching from the original substrate, and bonding to other substrates.

As used herein, two or more contacts or other items such as conductive channels or components are said to be "electrically connected" if they are connected by a material which is sufficiently conducting to ensure that the electric potential at each of the contacts or other items is intended to be the same, e.g., is about the same, at all times under any bias conditions.

As used herein, "blocking a voltage" refers to the ability of a transistor, device, or component to prevent significant current, such as current that is greater than 0.001 times the operating current during regular conduction, from flowing

through the transistor, device, or component when a voltage is applied across the transistor, device, or component. In other words, while a transistor, device, or component is blocking a voltage that is applied across it, the total current passing through the transistor, device, or component will not be greater than 0.001 times the operating current during regular conduction. Devices with off-state currents which are larger than this value exhibit high loss and low efficiency, and are typically not suitable for many applications, especially power switching applications.

As used herein, a "high-voltage device", e.g., a high-voltage switching transistor, HEMT, bidirectional switch, or four-quadrant switch (FQS), is an electronic device which is optimized for high-voltage applications. That is, when the device is off, it is capable of blocking high voltages, such as about 300V or higher, about 600V or higher, or about 1200V or higher, and when the device is on, it has a sufficiently low on-resistance (R_{ON}) for the application in which it is used, e.g., it experiences sufficiently low conduction loss when a substantial current passes through the device. A high-voltage device can at least be capable of blocking a voltage equal to the high-voltage supply or the maximum voltage in the circuit for which it is used. A high-voltage device may be capable of blocking 300V, 600V, 1200V, 1700V, 2500V, or other suitable blocking voltage required by the application. In other words, a high-voltage device can block all voltages between 0V and at least V_{max} , where V_{max} is the maximum voltage that can be supplied by the circuit or power supply, and V_{max} can for example be 300V, 600V, 1200V, 1700V, 2500V, or other suitable blocking voltage required by the application.

As used herein, a "III-N device" is a device based on III-N heterostructures. The III-N device can be designed to operate as an E-mode transistor or switch. The III-N device can be a high-voltage device suitable for high voltage applications. In such a high-voltage device, when the device is biased off (e.g., the voltage on the gate relative to the source is less than the device threshold voltage), it is at least capable of supporting all source-drain voltages less than or equal to the high-voltage in the application in which the device is used, which for example may be 100V, 300V, 600V, 1200V, 1700V, 2500V, or higher. When the high voltage device is biased on (e.g., the voltage on the gate relative to the source or associated power terminal is greater than the device threshold voltage), it is able to conduct substantial current with a low on-voltage (i.e., a low voltage between the source and drain terminals or between opposite power terminals). The maximum allowable on-voltage is the maximum on-state voltage that can be sustained in the application in which the device is used.

The details of one or more disclosed implementations of the subject matter described in this specification are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below. Additional features and variations may be included in the implementations as well. For example, an FQS having N-polar III-N layers can be formed by including a second gate structure between electrodes 1122 and 1124 in the device of FIG. 11G. Other features, aspects, and advantages will become apparent from the description, the drawings and the claims.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of an example III-N device.

FIGS. 2A-2B are flow diagrams of an example process for forming the III-N device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3A is a flow diagram of an example process for forming a trench in the III-N device of FIG. 1 or FIG. 2A.

FIG. 3B illustrates the example process for forming the trench in FIG. 3A.

FIG. 4 shows characterization results for an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film and a polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film.

FIG. 5 shows threshold voltage variations of III-N devices formed on a single wafer.

FIG. 6 shows characteristics of a III-N device with an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film as a gate insulator at room temperature.

FIG. 7 shows characteristics of a III-N device with a polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film as a gate insulator at room temperature.

FIG. 8 shows OFF-state characteristics of the III-N device of FIG. 1 at an elevated temperature over a period of time.

FIG. 9 shows characteristics of the III-N device of FIG. 1 before and after being subjected to an elevated temperature.

FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of another example III-N device.

FIG. 11G is a cross-sectional view of an N-polar III-N device.

FIGS. 11A-11F illustrate an example process for forming the device of FIG. 11G.

FIGS. 12A-12F illustrate an example process for forming another III-N device.

FIG. 13 is a cross-sectional view of another example III-N device.

FIGS. 14A-14F illustrate an example process for forming yet another III-N device.

Like reference numbers and designations in the various drawings indicate like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 is a cross sectional view of an example III-N device 100. The III-N device 100 can be a III-N transistor or switch, and in particular a high-voltage III-N enhancement-mode field effect transistor.

The III-N device 100 includes a substrate layer 110. The substrate layer 110 can be a substrate made of, for example, Silicon (Si), Silicon Carbide (SiC), Sapphire (Al_2O_3), Aluminum Nitride (AlN), Gallium Nitride (GaN), or any other suitable substrate upon which III-N materials can be formed.

A buffer layer 112 is formed on the substrate layer 110. The buffer layer 112 can be a III-N buffer layer, e.g., a GaN layer, an $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ layer, or the like. The buffer layer 112 can be rendered insulating or substantially free of n-type mobile carriers, e.g., by including dislocations or point defects in the buffer layer 112, and/or by doping the buffer layer 112 with compensating elements, e.g., Iron (Fe), Carbon (C), and/or Magnesium (Mg). The buffer layer 112 can have a substantially uniform composition throughout the layer. In some implementations, one or more compositions vary throughout the buffer layer 112. For example, the buffer layer 112 can be graded, e.g., by grading an Al composition in the buffer layer 112. In some cases, the buffer layer 112 is substantially thicker than any of the other III-N layers in the III-N device 100.

The III-N device 100 includes a channel layer 114 formed on the buffer layer 112. The channel layer 114 can be a III-N layer, e.g., an undoped GaN layer or a slightly or unintentionally doped GaN layer. In some examples, the channel layer 114 is a III-N layer without Al composition, for example GaN or $\text{In}_z\text{Ga}_{1-z}\text{N}$.

A barrier layer 116 is formed on the channel layer 114. The barrier layer 116 and the channel layer 114 can have different compositions or III-N materials from one another. The compositions or III-N materials are selected such that the barrier

layer 116 can have a larger bandgap than the channel layer 114. In some examples, the barrier layer 116 is an Al-based III-N layer, e.g., an $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ layer, an $\text{Al}_y\text{In}_{1-y}\text{N}$ layer, or an AlInGaN layer. The channel layer can be an undoped GaN layer. The barrier layer 116 can be n-doped or can contain no significant concentration of doping impurities. In the case that the barrier layer 116 is undoped, polarization fields can exist between the channel layer 114 and the barrier layer 116, such that a fixed charge is induced at or adjacent to the interface between layers 114 and 116.

The band edge discontinuity in the conduction band of the III-N material structure, resulting from the bandgap difference and/or the difference in electron affinity between layers 114 and 116, in combination with the doping of the barrier layer 116 or introduced polarization, can induce a conductive channel 119 in the channel layer 114, e.g., near an interface between the channel layer 114 and the barrier layer 116, as illustrated in FIG. 1. The conductive channel 119 can include a 2-dimensional electron gas (2DEG) channel, e.g., between source contact 121 and gate contact 123, as well as gate contact 123 and drain contact 122. As shown in FIG. 1, when the device 100 is in the OFF state (i.e., the gate contact 123 is biased relative to the source contact 121 at a voltage lower than the device threshold voltage), the conductive channel 119 is depleted of mobile charge below the gate electrode 123, and so the 2DEG is discontinuous between the source contact 121 and the drain contact 122. When the device 100 is in the ON state (i.e., the gate contact 123 is biased relative to the source contact 121 at a voltage lower than the device threshold voltage), the conductive channel 119 below the gate electrode 123 is populated with mobile charge (not shown in FIG. 1), and the 2DEG is continuous from the source all the way to the drain. In some implementations, the source and drain contacts 121 and 122, respectively, form ohmic contacts electrically coupled to, electrically connected to, or contacting the 2DEG channel. The gate contact 123 can modulate a portion of the 2DEG channel in a gate region, e.g., directly beneath the gate contact 123.

The III-N device 100 can also include an insulator layer 118. The insulator layer 118 can be a passivation layer, preventing or suppressing dispersion by preventing or suppressing voltage fluctuations at the uppermost III-N surface. The insulator layer 118 can be made of Si_3N_4 , Al_2O_3 , SiO_2 , $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$, or the like, and can be prepared by metal organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD), low pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD), plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD), chemical vapor deposition (CVD), sputtering, atomic layer deposition (ALD), high density chemical vapor deposition, or any suitable deposition process. In a particular example, the insulator layer 118 is a Silicon Nitride (Si_3N_4) layer formed by MOCVD.

The source contact 121, e.g., a source electrode, and the drain contact 122, e.g., a drain electrode, can be formed by metal stacks in contact with one of the III-N layers, e.g., the channel layer 114. The metal stacks can be Ti/Al/Ni/Au, Ti/Al, or the like. The source contact 121 and the drain contact 122 can be formed by metal evaporation and post-deposition annealing processes. Other ohmic contact processes can also be used.

To shape the electric field in a high-voltage-field region of the III-N device 100, a trench 124 is formed to reduce a peak electric field and increase a device breakdown voltage or threshold voltage, thereby allowing for high voltage operation. The trench 124 can also cause the device 100 to operate in enhancement mode (i.e., to be an E-mode device). The trench 124 can be formed by removing part of the insulator layer 118 and part or all of the barrier layer 116 in a trench

shape. The residual damage in the channel layer, as well as the depth and shape of the trench, are crucial for achieving enhancement mode operation along with a low device on-resistance R_{on} , as further described below.

In some implementations, dry etching techniques, e.g., plasma etching, digital plasma etching, or reactive ion etching (RIE), are used to form a trench or recess structure. The dry etching techniques can cause ion bombardment damage, which can reduce the channel carrier mobility. These techniques also have low etching selectivity with respect to III-Nitride materials. That is, it is difficult to selectively etch one composition of III-Nitride materials without substantially etching a different composition of III-Nitride materials using these techniques. Furthermore, it can be difficult to recover a surface with ion bombardment damage. Etching selectivity can also be important for III-N epitaxy films, as each layer grown epitaxially on a substrate has thickness and composition variations from a center of a wafer to an edge of the wafer. In some cases, the dry etching techniques have little etching selectivity between a barrier layer and a channel layer. Thus, large threshold voltage variations can be caused by different etching depths.

To realize an enhancement-mode transistor using a III-N device structure, it can be important to control etching depth in the trench or recess. A device having the III-N material structure of device 100 but lacking the trench 124 typically operates in depletion mode. Including a recess or trench 124 in the III-N material structure in the gate region of the device causes the device threshold voltage to shift to a lower value. If the etching depth is not deep enough, such that the shift in threshold voltage is small, the III-N device may still remain a depletion mode device, exhibiting normally-on characteristics. If the etching depth is too deep and extends into the channel layer, current communications between the conductive channel underneath gate contact and conductive channels in the device access regions (i.e., the regions between the source and gate and between the gate and drain) can be cut off, even when the device is biased in the ON state. In this case, the III-N device may have a low current density or may not be operational in the ON state, even though normally-off E-mode operation can be realized. Although dry etching rates can be calibrated to reasonable accuracy, variations in barrier layer thickness between different wafers due to growth condition fluctuations of III-N epitaxy films, as well as variations across a single wafer, may cause low manufacturing yield.

In some implementations, as discussed in further details in FIGS. 2A-2B and FIGS. 3A-3B, a wet etching technique can be used in the formation of trench 124. Using the wet etching technique, the barrier layer 116 in the trench 124 can be completely removed and the etching can stop precisely on a top surface of the channel layer 114 in a self-aligned style. In some examples, the barrier layer 116 can be completely removed under a tolerance of barrier layer thickness fluctuations, which can improve the etch depth uniformity over the wafer and improve manufacturing yield.

Trench etch cross-sections are typically either rectangular or trapezoidal, i.e., trenches either have vertical sidewalls or sloping sidewalls, but not both. In a device such as device 100, having vertical sidewalls throughout the trench is not desirable, since conformal deposition of defect-free gate dielectric and gate metal can be challenges in III-N device structures having recesses or trenches with vertically shaped sidewalls. However, having sloped sidewalls throughout the trench, and in particular in the portion of the trench that is through the III-N material, is also not desirable because thickness variations in the barrier layer adjacent to the bottom of the trench

reduces 2DEG charge density and increases resistance of the access regions in the portion of the channel directly adjacent to but not directly under the bottom of the trench. It is therefore desirable that the trench sidewalls are vertical in the barrier layer 116 but sloped in the overlying insulator layer 118.

After wet etching, as indicated in FIG. 1, the trench 124 can have vertical sidewalls in the barrier layer 116 and slanted sidewalls in the insulator layer 118, as discussed in further details below. A top surface of the channel layer 114 is exposed in the trench 124. The trench 124 extends from the top surface of the channel layer 114 through the barrier layer 116 and the insulator layer 118 to a top surface of the insulator layer 118.

A gate insulator 120, e.g., a gate insulator layer or a gate dielectric layer, is grown or deposited conformally at least partially in the trench 124. The gate insulator 120 can be on the top surface of the channel layer 114. The gate insulator 120 can extend at least from the top surface of the channel layer 114 to the top surface of the insulator layer 118. The gate insulator 120 can also have vertical sidewalls in the barrier layer 116 and slanted sidewalls in the insulator layer 118.

The gate insulator 120 can, for example, be formed of or include Aluminum Oxide (Al_2O_3), Silicon Dioxide (SiO_2), Si_xN_y , or any other wide bandgap insulator. In some examples, the gate insulator 120 is an $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer, e.g., an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer or a polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer, where x and y represent the relative fractional compositions of non-nitrogen elements in the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer. That is, $x/(x+y)$ is the percent of non-nitrogen elements in the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer that are constituted by aluminum, $y/(x+y)$ is the percent of non-nitrogen elements in the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer that are constituted by silicon, and x/y is the ratio of aluminum to silicon in the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer. In a particular example, as discussed in further details below, the gate insulator 120 includes an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film that provides high gate bias and low gate leakage. The amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can have a thickness of between about 1 nm and 100 nm, for example between 1 nm and 60 nm.

In some implementations, the gate insulator 120 is a ternary compound such as an $\text{Al}_x\text{A}_y\text{N}$ layer, where A is an element from the fourth group of the periodic table, e.g., an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer or a polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ layer. Gate insulator 120 could also be a wideband gap quaternary insulator such as $\text{Al}_x\text{M}_y\text{A}_z\text{N}$, where M is a transition metal element, A is an element of the fourth group of the periodic table, and x , y , and z are the relative fractional compositions of non-nitrogen elements in the $\text{Al}_x\text{M}_y\text{A}_z\text{N}$ layer. The quaternary insulator reduces to the ternary when either y or z is equal to zero. Although amorphous films may be preferable, other mixed phase matrices could also be used.

Next, the gate contact 123, e.g., a gate electrode, is formed conformally on the gate insulator 120 at least partially in the recess 124. Similarly to the gate insulator 120, the portion of the gate contact 123 that is in the trench and adjacent to the barrier layer 116 can be oriented vertically, and the portion of the gate contact 123 that is in the trench and adjacent to the insulator layer 118 can be slanted. In some implementations, the gate contact 123 includes extending portions that are outside the trench 124 and extend towards the source contact 121 and/or the drain contact 122, respectively. The extending portions are separated from the source contact 121 and the drain contact 122, respectively. The extending portions of the gate contact 123 can function as field plates for the III-N device 100. In some examples, the extending portions of the gate contact at least partially include the slanted portions of

the gate contact and can function as slant field plates, which may improve device performance.

The gate contact **123** can be formed as metal stacks, e.g., nickel/gold (Ni/Au), and can be deposited by metal evaporation or sputtering or chemical vapor deposition. The gate contact **123** may alternatively be another conductive material or material stack including one or more materials having a large work function, such as a semiconductor material having a large work function (e.g., p-type poly-silicon, indium tin oxide, or titanium nitride). A post-deposition annealing process may optionally be performed after deposition of the gate contact **123**. Finally, the gate contact **123** can be used as an etch mask to etch the gate insulator **120**, such that the gate insulator **120** remains directly beneath the gate contact **123** but is etched away everywhere else.

As illustrated in FIG. 1, when 0V (or any voltage less than the device threshold voltage) is applied to the gate contact **123** relative to the source contact **121**, the conductive channel **119** is discontinuous in a region of the channel layer **114** directly beneath the trench **124** in the gate region of the III-N device **100**. As a consequence of the discontinuity of the conductive channel **119**, the device channel between the source and drain contacts is not conductive when 0 V is applied to the gate contact **123** relative to the source contact **121**, but is readily conductive when a sufficiently positive voltage, e.g., above a device threshold voltage, is applied to the gate contact **123** relative to the source contact **121**. Thus, the III-device **100** can function as a high-voltage enhancement-mode device for high voltage applications. The III-N device **100** can be a transistor, a bidirectional switch or four quadrant switch (FQS), and/or any suitable semiconductor device.

FIGS. 2A-2B show an example process **200** for forming a III-N device. The process **200** can be utilized to form the III-N device **100** of FIG. 1.

Referring to FIG. 2A, the process **200** includes forming a buffer layer on a substrate (**202**). The buffer layer and the substrate can be the buffer layer **112** and the substrate layer **110** of FIG. 1, respectively. The substrate can be a silicon wafer. The buffer layer can be formed by either directly growing the buffer layer on the substrate, or alternatively by growing the buffer layer on a first substrate, detaching the buffer layer from the first substrate, and bonding the buffer layer to the substrate. As noted above, forming the buffer layer (step **202**) can also include doping the buffer layer with compensating elements.

Next, a III-N channel layer is formed on the buffer layer (step **204**). The III-N channel layer can be the channel layer **114** of FIG. 1. The III-N channel layer can be an undoped III-N layer, e.g., an undoped GaN layer. In a particular example, the III-N channel layer is an undoped GaN layer and is substantially free of Al.

A III-N barrier layer is then formed on the channel layer (step **206**). The III-N barrier layer can be the barrier layer **116** of FIG. 1. The III-N barrier layer includes different composition or III-N materials from the channel layer, such that the barrier layer has a larger bandgap than the channel layer and a conductive channel, e.g., a 2DEG channel, can be induced in the channel layer. In some examples, the barrier layer is an $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ layer. The barrier layer can have a thickness of about 30 nm. In particular implementations, the III-N barrier layer is an $\text{Al}_x\text{In}_y\text{Ga}_{1-x-y}\text{N}$ layer, where x and y are the respective aluminum and indium fractional compositions, $x+y$ is the gallium fractional composition, $0 < x \leq 1$, $0 \leq y < 1$, and $0 \leq x+y < 1$.

Next, an insulator layer is formed on the barrier layer (step **208**). The insulator layer can be the insulator layer **118** of FIG. 1. As noted above, the insulator layer can be made of

Si_xN_y , Al_2O_3 , SiO_2 , $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$, or the like, and can be deposited by MOCVD, LPCVD, PECVD, CVD, HDPCVD, sputtering, activated reactive sputtering, ALD, plasma assisted ALD, or any suitable deposition process. In a particular example, the insulator layer is a SiN_x layer formed by MOCVD.

A trench is then formed to expose a top surface of the channel layer (step **210**). The trench can be the trench **124** of FIG. 1. As discussed in further details in FIGS. 3A and 3B, formation of the trench can include using a wet etching technique. After wet etching, the formed trench can have vertical sidewalls in the barrier layer **316** and slanted sidewalls in the insulator layer **318**. The barrier layer can be removed in the trench region and the top surface of the channel layer **314** can be exposed in the trench. The trench can extend from the top surface of the channel layer **314** through the barrier layer **316** and the insulator layer **318** to a top surface of the insulator layer. In some examples, the conductive channel is discontinuous in a region of the channel layer directly beneath the trench when no voltages are applied to any of the device electrodes (e.g., the source, the gate, or the drain).

Referring now to FIG. 2B, a gate insulator is formed on the top surface of the channel layer (step **212**). The gate insulator can be the gate insulator **120** of FIG. 1. The gate insulator is formed conformally at least partially in the trench. The gate insulator can be in direct contact with the top surface of the channel layer without barrier material therebetween. The portion of the gate insulator contacting the barrier layer can have vertical sidewalls, and the portion of the gate insulator contacting the insulator layer can have slanted sidewalls.

In some implementations, to achieve high gate bias and low gate leakage, an amorphous aluminum silicon nitride (e.g., $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$) film is grown as the gate insulator. The III-N device with the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film as the gate insulator can achieve a high breakdown electrical field, low interface traps, and high temperature stability, as discussed in further details in FIGS. 6 to 9.

The amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film can be grown by using CVD, LPCVD, MOCVD, molecular beam epitaxy (MBE), sputter deposition, or any suitable deposition process. In some examples, the grown amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film has a thickness of between 1 nm and 100 nm, for example between about 1 nm and 60 nm.

During formation of the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film, a number of growth or deposition conditions can be optimized to ensure that the resulting $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film is amorphous (rather than polycrystalline). For example, the growth or deposition temperature, chamber pressure, and/or Si/Al ratio can be optimized to realize an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film. Generally, decreasing the growth or deposition temperature and increasing the Si/Al ratio tends to cause the deposited $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film to be amorphous, rather than polycrystalline. For example, for a growth or deposition temperature of about 1000° C. or higher, the resulting $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ can be amorphous if the Si/Al ratio is about $\frac{1}{4}$ or greater, whereas for a growth or deposition temperature of about 800° C. or higher, the resulting $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ can be amorphous if the Si/Al ratio is about $\frac{2}{3}$ or greater. However, it has been found that increasing the growth or deposition temperature, and/or decreasing the Si/Al ratio, in an $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ gate insulator film of a III-N enhancement-mode device causes the gate leakage in the device to decrease substantially as long as the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ is amorphous (devices with polycrystalline films have been found to exhibit substantially higher gate leakage). Hence, the deposition conditions of the $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ gate insulator film can be optimized such that a high deposition temperature and low Si/Al ratio are maintained will still achieving an amorphous film. In some implementations, the growth or deposition temperature of the amorphous

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$\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film is greater than 500°C ., for example greater than 800°C . or greater than 900°C ., and/or the ratio of the Si fractional composition to the Al fractional composition y/x is less than $2/3$, for example less than $1/3$, less than $1/6$, or less than $7/9$.

Grown $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ films can be characterized by utilizing an X-ray diffraction (XRD) grazing scan to determine whether or not any crystal grains exist. FIG. 4 shows characterization results for an amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film and a polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film. Peaks in the XRD curves indicate that the film includes at least portions which are crystalline or polycrystalline. As curve 402 shows, there are no peaks appearing in the scan of the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film. On the other hand, as curve 404 shows, AlN crystalline peaks 406 can be detected in the polycrystalline $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film.

Referring back to FIG. 2B, source and drain contacts which are electrically coupled to the channel layer are then formed (step 214). The source and drain contacts can be the source contact 121 and the drain contact 122 of FIG. 1, respectively. As noted above, the source contact and the drain contact can be formed as metal stacks, e.g., Ti/Al/Ni/Au or Ti/Al, in contact with the channel layer in the III-N device, e.g., by using metal evaporation or sputtering, and optionally performing a post-deposition annealing process. In some examples, the source and drain contacts, respectively, form ohmic contacts electrically contacting or coupled to the conductive channel, e.g., the 2DEG channel, in the channel layer. The source and drain contacts may optionally be formed prior to forming the trench.

Next, a gate electrode is formed on the gate insulator between the source and drain contacts (step 216). The gate electrode can be the gate contact 123 of FIG. 1. As noted above, the gate electrode can be formed conformally on the gate insulator at least partially in the trench, by depositing metal stacks, e.g., nickel/gold (Ni/Au) using similar processes to those used for the source and drain contacts in step 214. The gate electrode can include vertical sidewalls in the trench adjacent to the barrier layer and slanted sidewalls in the trench adjacent to the insulator layer. In some implementations, the gate electrode includes extending portions that are outside the trench and extend towards but are separated from the source contact and the drain contact, respectively.

After deposition of the gate electrode, the gate electrode can further be used as an etch mask to etch the gate insulator, such that the gate insulator remains directly beneath the gate contact but is etched away elsewhere.

FIG. 3A shows an example process 300 for forming a trench in a III-N device. FIG. 3B illustrates structure configurations 350 of the III-N device of FIG. 3A in different steps, e.g., steps in the process 300. The trench and the III-N device can be the trench 124 and the III-N device 100 of FIG. 1, respectively. The process 300 can be the process 210 of FIG. 2A.

After process step 208 of FIG. 2A, the III-N device structure includes a buffer layer, a channel layer, a barrier layer, and an insulator layer sequentially formed on a substrate. The substrate, the buffer layer, the channel layer, the barrier layer, and the insulator layer can be the substrate layer 110, the buffer layer 112, the channel layer 114, the barrier layer 116, and the insulator layer 118 of FIG. 1, respectively.

The process 300 can begin with the step of forming an etch mask layer on top of the insulator layer (step 301). In some examples, a first Si_xN_y layer grown by MOCVD is used as the insulator layer, and a second Si_xN_y layer grown by PECVD is used as the etch mask layer. Due to different properties (e.g., density) of the films grown by the two different methods, the etch mask layer and the insulator layer can be each be etched

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by methods that do not substantially etch the other layer. For example, the Si_xN_y layer formed by PECVD can be etched by a suitable wet chemical etching technique (e.g., by using a heated phosphoric acid solution), while the Si_xN_y layer formed by MOCVD can be resistant to the same wet chemical etching technique. As such, after the etch mask layer is formed, an opening is formed in the etch mask layer for defining a trench through the underlying material. The opening can be formed, for example, by etching the etch mask layer using a heated phosphoric acid solution. Forming the opening in the etch mask layer can result in the sidewalls of the opening being slanted, as illustrated in etch mask layer 326 and insulator layer 318 in structure configuration 352 of FIG. 3B, in particular when wet etching is used to define the opening.

Next, the etch mask layer is used as a mask for removing part of the insulator layer beneath the opening to form a trench in the insulator layer (step 302). The step 302 can use any suitable etch technique to remove the part of the insulator layer. In a particular example, dry etching such as reactive-ion etching (RIE) in a gas ambient including SF_6 is used to etch the Si_xN_y in both the etch mask and the insulator layers, thereby patterning at least part of the trench and exposing the barrier layer.

Due to high etch selectivity between the insulator layer 318 (e.g., a Si_xN_y layer) and the barrier layer 316 (e.g., an $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ layer), the dry etching may stop on a top surface of the barrier layer, as illustrated in structure configuration 352 of FIG. 3B. Because the opening in the etch mask layer 326 is formed having slanted sidewalls, the resulting trench that is etched through the insulator layer can also have slanted sidewalls.

The trench is then extended into the III-N materials by removing part of the barrier layer 316 (step 304). The part of the barrier layer that is removed in order to extend the trench into the III-N materials can be removed by dry etching, e.g., by using RIE etching in a gas ambient including Cl_2 instead of SF_6 (which was used for the insulator layer). The etching depth into the barrier layer can be controlled, e.g., by controlling etching rate and/or etching time, such that the remaining barrier layer has a particular thickness away from a top surface of the channel layer, as illustrated in structure configuration 354 of FIG. 3B. The remaining portion of the barrier layer 316 in the region in which the trench is being formed can be subsequently removed by an annealing process (step 306) followed by a wet etching process (step 308), as discussed in further detail below.

As noted above, after the trench is extended into the III-N materials by dry etching part of the barrier layer 316, a portion of the barrier layer remains beneath the trench, the remaining portion being thinner than the original thickness of the barrier layer (the original thickness being the same as the thickness of the barrier layer on either side of the trench). The remaining portion of the barrier layer in the trench region is then removed in order to extend the trench to the upper surface of the III-N channel layer 314. The following process may be used to remove the remaining portion of the III-N barrier layer without etching the III-N channel layer.

After extending the trench into the III-N materials by dry etching part of the barrier layer, the III-N device is annealed in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature (step 306). As noted above, the channel layer can be a III-N layer which does not contain aluminum (Al) as one of the group-III elements (e.g., the channel layer can be a GaN layer). The barrier layer can be a III-N layer which includes Al as one of the group-III elements (e.g., the barrier layer can be an $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ layer). The annealing process can selectively

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oxidize the Al-containing barrier layer, without oxidizing the channel layer, as the channel layer can be resistive to oxidation due to the lack of aluminum in the layer. Referring to the structure configuration 356 of FIG. 3B, the oxidized region of the barrier layer 316 is indicated by a shaded region 362 that stops at the top surface of the channel layer 314.

The elevated temperature for annealing, as well as the remaining thickness of the barrier layer in the trench region prior to annealing, are critical parameter for high selectivity of etching between the oxidized barrier layer and the un-oxidized channel layer. The elevated annealing temperature is typically within a temperature range from about 300° C. to 700° C. In a particularly example, the elevated annealing temperature is about 500° C. In some cases, if the anneal temperature is too high, for example higher than 700° C., the channel layer will also be partially oxidized and will be etched away during the subsequent etching process, which will render the device inoperable. On the other hand, if the anneal temperature is too low, then the remaining barrier layer in the trench region may not be completely oxidized during the anneal process, which could also render the device inoperable.

In order for the trench to be etched precisely to the upper surface of the channel layer, it can also be important to ensure that, after dry etching of the barrier layer, the remaining barrier layer has a particular thickness that is within a predetermined thickness range. For example, if the initial thickness of the barrier layer prior to etching is about 30 nm, the predetermined thickness range to which the barrier layer is etched to in the trench region prior to the oxidation step can be between about 3 nm and 10 nm.

If the remaining thickness of the barrier layer prior to oxidation is smaller than the minimum predetermined thickness, e.g., smaller than 3 nm, the dry etching in step 304 can cause ion bombardment damage in the channel layer, thus damaging the device channel and worsening the performance of the device, or possibly rendering the device inoperable. Additionally, when the remaining thickness of the barrier layer prior to oxidation is too small, the subsequent anneal process can partially oxidize the channel layer, which is undesirable in that it could also render the device inoperable.

If the remaining thickness of the barrier layer prior to oxidation is larger than the maximum predetermined thickness, e.g., larger than 10 nm, the subsequent anneal process may not be able to oxidize all the remaining barrier layer in the trench region, such that the subsequent wet etching process can not completely remove the barrier layer from the top surface of the channel layer in the trench, which may deteriorate device performance of the III-N device.

In some implementations of the process 300, the initial thickness (i.e., the as-grown thickness) of the III-N barrier layer is within the predetermined range for which the oxidation of the III-N barrier layer stops precisely at the upper surface of the III-N channel layer. In this case, the step of dry etching the III-N barrier layer prior to annealing may be omitted, and the anneal can be performed after etching through the thickness of the insulator layer without first etching any of the III-N barrier layer.

After the anneal which oxidizes the portion of the III-N barrier layer in the trench region, the remaining oxidized portion of the barrier layer in the trench region can be removed using wet etching (step 308). The wet etching can be wet chemical etching in an alkaline solution, e.g., KOH solution or TMAH solution. A temperature of the alkaline solution bath can vary from room temperature to 100° C.

As discussed above, during wet chemical etching, alkaline solution can selectively remove the oxidized barrier layer

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without attacking the un-oxidized channel layer. Therefore, the remaining oxidized barrier layer can be completely removed from above the channel layer in the trench region, and the top surface of the channel layer can be exposed below the trench, as illustrated in the structure configuration 358 of FIG. 3B.

In some examples, as further illustrated in the structure configuration 358 of FIG. 3B, the trench in the barrier layer 316 has vertical sidewalls after wet etching. This is believed to be possibly due to anisotropic oxidation of the III-N barrier layer. It is believed that under the oxidation conditions previously described, the III-N materials oxidized selectively along the direction in which dislocations in the III-N materials exist. Because dislocations are formed along the direction of growth, the oxidation also occurs along the growth direction of the III-N materials, and not in a lateral direction. Hence, as illustrated in structure configuration 356, the interfaces between the oxidized portion of the barrier layer 362 and the non-oxidized portions on either side of the oxidized portion are vertical (or at least substantially more vertical than the slanted sidewalls of the trench along the insulator layer).

After the etch mask layer 326 can be removed from the III-N device, e.g., by using suitable wet chemical etching technique. As noted above, the etch mask layer can be a Si₃N₄ layer formed by PECVD, different from the Si₃N₄ insulator layer formed by MOCVD. Therefore, using a suitable wet chemical etch, the etch mask layer can be removed from a top surface of the insulator layer without etching the insulator layer.

As illustrated in structure configuration 360 of FIG. 3B, the III-N device has a trench formed with vertical sidewalls in the barrier layer 316 and slanted sidewalls in the insulator layer 318. The trench extends from the top surface of the channel layer 314, through the barrier layer and the insulator layer to the top surface of the insulator layer. The III-N device can be further processed according to the process 200, e.g., steps 212, 214 and 216, in FIG. 2B to form a III-N device, e.g., a high-voltage III-N enhancement-mode field effect transistor.

FIG. 5 shows threshold voltages 500 of a set of III-N devices, i.e., a set of high-voltage III-N enhancement-mode field effect transistors, which were all formed on the same 4-inch wafer using the processes described above, such that they each had the structure illustrated in FIG. 1. The threshold voltages of the III-N devices across the 4-inch wafer are plotted as a function of the distance of the device from the center of the wafer.

It is shown that the threshold voltage of the formed III-N devices are all above 2.5 V, with a threshold voltage variation of no more than about 0.7 V across the entire wafer. Since the techniques can accurately control the etch depth of the barrier layer in the trench, e.g., by removing the barrier layer with wet chemical etching and ending up on top of the channel layer without ion bombardment damage on the channel layer, the channel electron mobility and interface quality after the gate insulator deposited on the top of the channel layer is quite uniform across the wafer, which ensures high manufacturing productivity and repeatability.

FIG. 6 shows transfer curves 600 (in log scale) of a III-N device with an amorphous Al_xSi_{3-x}N film as a gate insulator at room temperature, e.g., at about 300 K. The III-N device has the structure of the III-N device 100 of FIG. 1, and was formed by techniques described above in the process 200 of FIGS. 2A-2B and the process 300 of FIGS. 3A-3B. As curve 602 shows, the transistor demonstrates enhancement-mode characteristics with a threshold voltage V_{th} more than 2 V (the threshold voltage is the gate-source voltage V_{GS} at which the current begins to rise, indicating that the device is turning

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on). The threshold voltage hysteresis between the positive direction sweep (2) and the negative direction sweep (1) is less than 0.5 V, which indicates low density of interface traps. As curve 604 shows, an ON-state drain current density I_{DS} is around 250 mA/mm. An OFF-state drain leakage current density I_{DS} is about 10^{-8} mA/mm and the gate leakage current I_{GS} is about 10^{-6} mA/mm.

FIG. 7 shows transfer curves 700 (in log scale) of a III-N device (field effect transistor) with a polycrystalline Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator at room temperature. As discussed above, with polycrystalline Al_xSi_yN , the transistor cannot be fully turned off because of high gate current leakage. As curve 704 shows, the gate leakage current is more than 10 mA/mm. As curve 702 shows, the transistor has a threshold voltage of about 1 V, and the drain current density is about 10 mA/mm at ON-state and 5 mA/mm at OFF-state. The gate electrode of the transistor may be easily broken down under low gate bias. As shown in FIG. 7, the gate leakage current of the device with the polycrystalline Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator when the device was biased at a gate-source voltage of 0V was about 1 mA/mm, while the gate-leakage current of the devices with amorphous Al_xSi_yN gate insulator films was less than 10^{-6} mA/mm under the same bias conditions (as can be seen in FIG. 6). Hence, off state gate leakage currents in devices with amorphous Al_xSi_yN gate insulator films were found to be about 6 orders of magnitude lower than those in devices which had polycrystalline Al_xSi_yN gate insulator films but were otherwise identical.

Measurements in FIGS. 6 and 7 indicate that the III-N device with an amorphous Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator can achieve much better device performance, e.g., higher threshold voltage and lower leakage, than a III-N device with a polycrystalline Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator.

FIG. 8 shows OFF-state characteristics 800 of a III-N device at an elevated temperature over a period of time. The III-N device had the structure of the III-N device 100 of FIG. 1, with an amorphous Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator, and was formed by techniques described above in the process 200 of FIGS. 2A-2B and the process 300 of FIGS. 3A-3B.

The III-N device was tested at OFF-state, with zero volt gate bias (e.g., $V_{GS}=0$ V) and 120 V drain bias (e.g., $V_{DS}=120$ V) applied to the III-N device. The elevated temperature was about 400 K. Curves 802 and 804 show the OFF-state drain leakage current density and gate leakage current density stability, respectively, under the condition of high temperature (400K) drain bias stress for 1 hour. It is shown that the gate leakage current density I_{GS} , as well as the drain leakage current density I_{DS} , stayed stable without obvious variations. This level of stability is substantially better than any that have been achieved with other materials for the gate insulator layer.

FIG. 9 shows transfer curves 900 (in log scale) of a III-N device having an amorphous Al_xSi_yN film as a gate insulator before and after high temperature stress. The III-N device has the structure of the III-N device 100 of FIG. 1, and was formed by techniques described above in the process 200 of FIGS. 2A-2B and the process 300 of FIGS. 3A-3B. The III-N device tested for the measurements of FIG. 9 was the same device tested for the measurements of FIG. 6.

Curves 902 and 904 show that the drain current density and the gate current density before and after the device was held at a high temperature of 400 K. It is shown that there is no obvious change observed after the high temperature stress. Additionally, as curve 902 shows, the threshold voltage of the III-N device is about 3 V, the ON-state drain current density is about 100 mA/mm at ON-state, and the OFF-state drain leakage current density is about 10^{-7} mA/mm. As curve 904

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shows, the OFF-state gate leakage current density is less than 10^{-6} mA/mm (it is about 10^{-7} mA/mm). Compared to measurement results at room temperature at about 300 K in FIG. 6, the performance of the III-N device does not change significantly with the high temperature drain bias stress.

FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of another III-N device 1000. Device 1000 is similar to device 100 of FIG. 1, except that device 1000 includes two gate electrodes 1023 and 1023' between the power electrodes 1021 and 1022. Device 1000 can be operated as a bidirectional switch (i.e., a four quadrant switch or FQS), where voltages on the first gate electrode 1023 are applied relative to the first power electrode 1021, voltages on the second gate electrode 1023' are applied relative to the second power electrode 1022, and power electrodes 1021 and 1022 are each operated as a source and a drain of the device 1000 (depending on the polarity of the voltage across the device and/or the direction of current flow).

Layers 1010, 1012, 1014, 1016, and 1018 of device 1000 each have the same properties as respective layers 110, 112, 114, 116, and 118 of the device of FIG. 1, and can therefore be the same materials and formed using the same methods previously described with reference to device 100 of FIG. 1. Trenches 1024 and 1024' can each have the same shape and properties as trench 124 in FIG. 1, and can be formed by the same methods as those described with reference to device 100 of FIG. 1. Gate electrodes 1023 and 1023', as well as their respective gate insulator layers 1020 and 1020', can each have the same shape and properties as gate insulator layers 120 in FIG. 1, and can be formed by the same methods and/or from the same materials as those described with reference to device 100 of FIG. 1.

A III-N device 1100, e.g., a nitrogen polar (N-polar) enhancement-mode III-N transistor, in which the III-N materials are formed in a nitrogen polar (i.e., N-polar) orientation is illustrated in FIG. 11G. The device 1100 includes a series of III-N layers 1104, 1106, 1108, and 1110 formed in an N-polar or [0 0 0 -1] orientation on a substrate 1102, which can for example be a silicon substrate. That is, the N-face or [0 0 0 -1] face of the III-N material structure is on an opposite side of the III-N material structure from the substrate 1102.

III-N layer 1104 is a buffer layer formed of a material such as GaN, AlGaN, or combinations thereof. III-N layer 1106 is a first barrier layer formed of a material such as AlGaN, AlInN, or AlInGaIn, III-N layer 1108 is a channel layer formed of a material such as GaN, and III-N layer 1110 is a second barrier layer formed of a material such as AlGaN, AlInN, or AlInGaIn. The first barrier layer 1106 has a larger bandgap than the channel layer 1108, such that a conductive channel 1118 (e.g., a 2DEG channel) is induced in the channel layer 1108 adjacent to the interface between the channel layer 1108 and the first barrier layer 1106. The second barrier layer 1110 is over the channel layer 1108 in the gate region of the device (i.e., directly beneath the gate electrode 1120) but not over the channel layer 1108 in the device access regions on opposite sides of the gate region. The second barrier layer 1110 has a larger bandgap than the channel layer, and is sufficiently thick (e.g., at least 2 nm or at least 5 nm thick) to ensure that mobile charge is depleted from the 2DEG in the gate region of the device when 0V is applied to the gate electrode 1120 relative to the source contact 1122, but that the 2DEG is populated with mobile charge in the gate region when a sufficiently high positive voltage is applied to the gate electrode 1120 relative to the source contact 1122.

Gate insulator layer 1112, which may optionally be omitted, is disposed between the gate electrode 1120 and the second III-N barrier layer 1110. Gate insulator layer can be formed of Al_xSi_yN , Si_xN_y , or the like. Source and drain con-

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tacts **1122** and **1124**, respectively, electrically contact the conductive channel **1118**. The source contact **1122**, the drain contact **1124**, and/or the gate contact **1120** are over an N-face of the III-N material structure.

A method of fabricating III-N device **1100** is illustrated in FIGS. **11A-11G**. First, as illustrated in FIG. **11A**, layers **1104**, **1106**, **1108**, **1110**, and **1112** are grown or deposited sequentially on the substrate. In some implementations, layers **1104**, **1106**, **1108**, **1110**, and **1112** are all grown by MOCVD. In some implementations, only layers **1104**, **1106**, **1108**, and **1110** are grown, and layer **1112** is omitted from the structure. Next, as shown in FIG. **11B**, a mask layer **1114**, which can for example be Si_xN_y , deposited by sputtering or PECVD, is deposited over the gate region of the device. In implementations where the gate insulator layer **1112** is included, the mask layer **1114** is then used as an etch mask for etching away the gate insulator layer **1112** on either side of the gate region (i.e., over the contact and access regions of the device), as shown in FIG. **11C**. For example, the gate insulator layer **1112** on either side of the gate region can be removed by dry etching using an etch chemistry that selectively etches the material of the gate insulator layer **1112** without etching the material of the second barrier layer **1110**.

Next, as shown in FIG. **11D**, the device is annealed in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature in order to oxidize the exposed portions of the second barrier layer **1110'** on either side of the gate region of the device, while the III-N material masked by the mask layer **1114** is not oxidized. As with other devices described herein, the second barrier layer **1110** can be formed of a III-N material which includes Al as one of the group-III elements (e.g., AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlGaInN), while the channel layer **1108** can be formed of a III-N material which is substantially free of Al (e.g., GaN), such that the oxidation step causes all of the exposed second barrier layer material to be oxidized without oxidizing the channel layer **1108**. In this case, as before, the oxidation stops precisely on the upper surface of the channel layer **1108**. In some implementations, the second barrier layer **1110** has a thickness within the predetermined range that allows for the oxidation to stop precisely on the upper surface of the channel layer **1108**, e.g., in the range of 3 nm to 10 nm. Although not shown in FIG. **11D**, in cases where the second barrier layer **1110** is thicker than the maximum thickness of the predetermined range, the second barrier layer **1110** may be partially removed, for example by dry etching, prior to the oxidation step.

Referring to FIG. **11E**, the oxidized portions **1110'** of the second barrier layer are then removed, for example using the wet etching process previously described, in order to expose an N-face of the channel layer **1108** and cause the 2DEG channel **1118** to be induced in the channel layer **1108** adjacent to the first barrier layer **1106** in the device access regions. Next, as shown in FIG. **11F**, the etch mask **1114** is removed. Finally, as shown in FIG. **11G**, the gate electrode **1120** is formed over the gate region of the device, and the source and drain contacts **1122** and **1124**, respectively, are formed on opposite sides of the gate electrode **1120**.

A III-N device **1200** which is similar to that of FIG. **1** but also includes an etch stop layer and a second barrier layer is illustrated in FIG. **12F**. The device **1200** includes a series of III-N layers **1212**, **1214**, **1230**, **1228**, and **1216** formed on a substrate **1210**, which can for example be a silicon substrate. III-N layer **1212** is a buffer layer formed of a material such as GaN, AlGaIn, or combinations thereof. III-N layer **1214** is a channel layer formed of a material such as GaN. III-N layer **1216** is a first barrier layer formed of a material such as AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlInGaIn. III-N layer **1228**, which is

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directly below the first barrier layer **1216**, is an etch stop layer formed of a material such as GaN. III-N layer **1230**, which is between the channel layer **1214** and the etch stop layer **1228**, is a second barrier layer formed of a material such as AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlInGaIn. Layer **1218** is an insulator layer formed of silicon nitride or the like.

As seen in FIG. **12F**, device **1200** can be formed as an enhancement-mode device. That is, as further described below, the thicknesses and compositions of III-N layers **1230**, **1228**, and **1216** can be selected such that when 0V is applied to the gate **1223** relative to the source **1221**, a conductive 2DEG channel **1219** is induced in the channel layer **1214** in the device access regions (i.e., between the source **1221** and the gate **1223** and between the drain **1222** and the gate **1223**) but not in the device gate region (i.e., beneath the gate). When a voltage greater than the device threshold voltage, which for an enhancement-mode device is greater than 0V, is applied to the gate **1223** relative to the source **1221**, the 2DEG channel **1219** is also induced in the device gate region in the channel layer **1214**, so that the conductive channel **1219** extends all the way from the source **1221** to the drain **1222**.

As further illustrated in FIG. **12F**, the second barrier layer **1230** and the etch stop layer **1228** are both formed beneath the gate in the gate region of the device, but the first barrier layer **1216** is not in the gate region (e.g., directly between the gate and the portion of the channel that is modulated by the gate) of the device. The first barrier layer is only included over the device access regions on either side of the gate region. In order to ensure that 2DEG channel **1214** is depleted of charge in the gate region when 0V is applied to the gate **1223** relative to the source **1221**, the second barrier layer can be made thin, for example between 0.1 nanometers and 3 nanometers or between 0.1 nanometers and 2 nanometers, and can have an aluminum composition that is less than 0.4 or less than 0.3. Forming barrier layer **1230** too thick and/or with too high an aluminum composition can cause the 2DEG **1219** to be formed in the gate region when 0V is applied to the gate relative to the drain, which would result in device **1200** being a depletion-mode device.

In order to ensure that 2DEG channel **1219** is induced in the access regions at all times, the first barrier layer **1216** can be formed sufficiently thick and with a sufficiently high aluminum concentration. For example, the first barrier layer can be thicker than 20 nanometers, for example between 20 and 50 nanometers, and have an aluminum composition greater than 0.2, for example between 0.2 and 0.5. The first barrier layer may also optionally be doped n-type.

As described in more detail below, gate **1223** is formed in a trench **1224** which is etched through the entire thickness of the first barrier layer **1216**. Etch stop layer **1228** is included to ensure precision in the depth that the trench is etched. In order to effectively function as an etch stop layer, layer **1228** cannot be made too thin. However, having etch stop layer too thick can degrade the performance of the device. As such, the etch stop layer typically has a thickness of greater than 0.5 nanometers, and is more typically formed to a thickness in the range of 1 nanometer to 5 nanometers or 1 nanometer to 3 nanometers.

Insulator layer **1218** is deposited on the first barrier layer **1216** and can be formed of Si_xN_y , or the like. A gate insulator **1220**, e.g., a gate insulator layer or a gate dielectric layer, is grown or deposited conformally at least partially in the trench **1224** and can be formed of $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}_z$, Si_xN_y , or the like. The gate insulator **1220** can be on the top surface of the etch stop layer **1228** in the gate region of the device. The gate insulator **1220** can extend at least from the top surface of the etch stop layer **1228** to the top surface of the insulator layer **1218**. The

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gate insulator **1220** can also have vertical sidewalls in the barrier layer **1216** and slanted sidewalls in the insulator layer **1218**. The gate electrode **1223** is deposited on the gate insulator **1220**. The source and drain contacts **1221** and **1222**, respectively, electrically contact the conductive channel **1219**.

A method of fabricating III-N device **1200** is illustrated in FIGS. **12A-12F**. First, as illustrated in FIG. **12A**, layers **1212**, **1214**, **1230**, **1228**, **1216**, and **1218** are grown or deposited sequentially on the substrate **1210**. In some implementations, layers **1212**, **1214**, **1230**, **1228**, **1216**, and **1218** are all grown by MOCVD. A mask layer **1226**, which can for example be Si_3N_4 , deposited by sputtering or PECVD, is deposited over the insulator layer **1218**. The mask **1226** and insulator **1218** are dry etched in a gate region of the device, and a trench **1224** is formed to a top surface of the first barrier layer **1216**. Next, as shown in FIG. **12B**, a portion of the first barrier layer **1216** is dry etched away, extending the trench **1224** part way through the first barrier layer.

The device is then annealed in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature in order to oxidize the exposed portions of the first barrier layer **1216** while the III-N material masked by the mask layer **1226** is not oxidized, as shown in FIG. **12C**. As with other devices described herein, the first barrier layer **1216** can be formed of a III-N material which includes Al as one of the group-III elements (e.g., AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlGaInN), while etch stop layer **1228** can be formed of a III-N material which is substantially free of Al (e.g., GaN), such that the oxidation step causes all of the exposed first barrier layer material to be oxidized, indicated by **1262**, without oxidizing the etch stop layer **1228**. In some implementations, after the trench **1224** is etched part way through the first barrier layer **1216** but prior to the oxidation step, the first barrier layer **1216** has a thickness beneath the trench **1224** that is within the predetermined range that allows for the oxidation to stop precisely on the upper surface of the etch stop layer **1228**, e.g., in the range of 3 nm to 10 nm. In other implementations, the oxidation step is performed without the trench being etched into the first barrier layer **1216**, so that the first barrier layer **1216** has the same thickness inside and outside the trench region prior to oxidation, and this entire thickness of the first barrier layer **1216** in the trench region is oxidized. Additionally, in some implementations, the second barrier layer **1230** is partially oxidized via diffusion through the etch stop layer **1228**, which can occur in cases where the etch stop layer **1228** is made very thin.

Next, as illustrated in FIG. **12D**, the oxidized portions **1262** of the first barrier layer are removed, for example using the wet etching process previously described, thereby extending the trench **1224** through the remainder of the first barrier layer **1216** to the upper surface of the etch stop layer **1228**. Then, as illustrated in FIG. **12E**, mask layer **1226** is removed. Finally, as shown in FIG. **12F**, source and drain contacts **1221** and **1222**, respectively, are formed on opposite sides of the trench **1224**, the gate insulator layer **1220** is formed in the trench **1224** in the gate region of the device, and the gate electrode **1223** is formed over the gate insulator **1220**.

Prior to deposition of the gate insulator layer **1220** and the gate electrode **1223**, the etch stop layer **1228** may optionally also be etched away in the gate region of the device, thereby extending the trench **1224** (labeled **1224'** in FIG. **13**) to the upper surface of the second barrier layer **1230**. The resulting structure **1300** is shown in FIG. **13**.

Another III-N device **1400** is illustrated in FIG. **14F**. The device **1400** includes a series of III-N layers **1412**, **1414**, **1440**, **1428**, and **1442** formed on a substrate **1410**, which can for example be a silicon substrate. III-N layer **1412** is a buffer

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layer formed of a material such as GaN, AlGaIn, or combinations thereof. III-N layer **1414** is a channel layer formed of a material such as GaN. III-N layer **1440** is a barrier layer formed of a material such as AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlInGaIn. III-N layer **1428**, which is directly above the barrier layer **1440**, is an etch stop layer formed of a material such as GaN. III-N layer **1442**, which is above the etch stop layer **1428**, is doped p-type and formed of a material such as p-AlGaIn. Layer **1444** is an insulator or passivation layer formed of silicon nitride or the like.

As seen in FIG. **14F**, device **1400** can be formed as an enhancement-mode device. That is, as further described below, the thicknesses and compositions of III-N layers **1440** and **1428** can be selected such that when 0V is applied to the gate **1423** relative to the source **1421**, a conductive 2DEG channel **1419** is induced in the channel layer **1414** in the device access regions (i.e., between the source **1421** and the gate **1423** and between the drain **1422** and the gate **1423**) but not in the device gate region (i.e., beneath the gate **1423**). When a voltage greater than the device threshold voltage, which for an enhancement-mode device is greater than 0V, is applied to the gate **1423** relative to the source **1421**, the 2DEG channel **1419** is also induced in the device gate region in the channel layer **1414**, so that the conductive channel **1419** extends all the way from the source **1421** to the drain **1422**.

As further illustrated in FIG. **14F**, the barrier layer **1440** and the etch stop layer **1428** are both formed beneath the gate in the gate region of the device (e.g., directly between the gate and the portion of the channel that is modulated by the gate), as well as in the device access regions on either side of the gate region. In order to ensure that 2DEG channel **1419** is induced in the access regions at all times, the barrier layer **1440** can be formed sufficiently thick and with a sufficiently high aluminum concentration. For example, the barrier layer can be thicker than 20 nanometers, for example between 20 and 50 nanometers, and have an aluminum composition greater than 0.2, for example between 0.2 and 0.5. The barrier layer may also optionally be doped n-type. Forming barrier layer **1440** too thick and/or with too high an aluminum composition can cause the 2DEG **1419** to be formed in the gate region when 0V is applied to the gate relative to the drain, which would result in device **1400** being a depletion-mode device.

In order to ensure that 2DEG channel **1419** is not induced in the gate region when 0V or a negative voltage is applied to the gate **1423** relative to the source **1421**, p-type layer **1442** is formed beneath gate **1423** to deplete the 2DEG channel **1419** within the gate region. The thickness and p-type doping level in the p-type layer **1442**, as well as its composition, is selected to ensure that the 2DEG channel **1419** is depleted in the device gate region when 0V is applied to the gate **1423** relative to the source **1421**. For example, the p-type doping level may be greater than 10^{18} cm^{-3} , greater than 10^{19} cm^{-3} , or greater than 10^{20} cm^{-3} , and the thickness may be greater than 1 nm, greater than 5 nm, or greater than 10 nm. Furthermore, as described below, p-type layer **1442** can be a III-Nitride layer which contains aluminum (Al), for example AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlInGaIn, in order to enable reproducible fabrication of the device **1400**.

As described in more detail below, gate **1423** is formed on p-type layer **1442**, and p-type layer **1442** is etched away in the device access regions. Etch stop layer **1428** is included to ensure precision in the depth of the etch which removes the p-type layer **1442** in the access regions. In order to effectively function as an etch stop layer, layer **1428** cannot be made too thin. However, having etch stop layer **1428** too thick can degrade the performance of the device. As such, the etch stop

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layer typically has a thickness of greater than 0.5 nanometers, and is more typically formed to a thickness in the range of 1 nanometer to 5 nanometers or 1 nanometer to 3 nanometers. The same materials, compositions, and thicknesses used for etch stop layer 1228 in device 1200 (FIG. 12F) may also be used for etch stop layer 1428.

Insulator layer 1444 is deposited on the etch stop layer 1428 and can be formed of Si_3N_4 , or the like. The source and drain contacts 1421 and 1422, respectively, electrically contact the conductive channel 1419.

A method of fabricating III-N device 1400 is illustrated in FIGS. 14A-14F. First, as illustrated in FIG. 14A, layers 1412, 1414, 1440, 1428, and 1442 are grown or deposited sequentially on the substrate 1410. In some implementations, layers 1412, 1414, 1440, 1428, and 1442 are all grown by MOCVD. A mask layer 1426, which can for example be Si_3N_4 , deposited by sputtering or PECVD, is deposited on a portion of the p-type layer 1442 in a gate region of the device. Next, as shown in FIG. 14B, a portion of the p-type layer 1442 is dry etched in the access regions of the device, such that the thickness of p-type layer 1442 is less in the access regions than in the gate region.

The device is then annealed in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature in order to oxidize the exposed portions of the p-type layer 1442 while the III-N material masked by the mask layer 1426 is not oxidized, as shown in FIG. 14C. As with other devices described herein, the barrier layer 1440 can be formed of a III-N material which includes Al as one of the group-III elements (e.g., AlGaIn, AlInN, or AlGaInN), while etch stop layer 1428 can be formed of a III-N material which is substantially free of Al (e.g., GaN or InGaIn), such that the oxidation step causes all of the exposed p-type layer 1442 to be oxidized, indicated by 1462, without oxidizing the etch stop layer 1428. In some implementations, after the p-type layer 1442 is etched part way through but prior to the oxidation step, the p-type layer has a thickness in the device access regions that is within the predetermined range that allows for the oxidation to stop precisely on the upper surface of etch stop layer 1428, e.g., in the range of 3 nm to 10 nm. Additionally, in some implementations, barrier layer 1440 is partially oxidized via diffusion through etch stop layer 1428, which can occur in cases where etch stop layer 1428 is made very thin. In still other implementations, the step of partially etching the p-type layer 1442 prior to oxidation (shown in FIG. 14B) is omitted. That is, the p-type layer 1442 may be made sufficiently thin, for example between 3 nm and 10 nm thick, so that the entire thickness of the exposed portions of layer 1442 may be readily oxidized without needing to first be thinned.

Next, as illustrated in FIG. 14D, the oxidized portions 1462 of p-AlGaIn layer 1442 are removed, for example using the wet etching process previously described, thereby exposing etch stop layer 1428 in the device access regions. Then, as illustrated in FIG. 14E, mask layer 1426 is removed. Finally, as shown in FIG. 14F, source and drain contacts 1421 and 1422, respectively, are formed on opposite sides of gate region, insulator layer 1444 is formed on the remaining exposed etch stop layer 1428, and the gate electrode 1423 is formed over the p-type layer 1442. In some implementations, insulator layer 1444 can be formed prior to forming source and drain contacts 1421 and 1422, respectively. Although not shown in FIGS. 14D-14F, prior to removing the mask layer 1426, the etch stop layer 1428 may also be removed in the device access regions, such that in the final device, the p-type layer 1442 and etch stop layer 1428 are in the gate region of the device (i.e., beneath the gate) but not in the device access regions on either side of the gate region.

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A number of implementations have been described. Nevertheless, it will be understood that various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the techniques and devices described herein. For example, the III-N layer structures and gate structures shown for the HEMT devices of FIGS. 11G, 12F, 13, and 14 can also be utilized to form a bidirectional switch such as that shown in FIG. 10. Features shown in each of the implementations may be used independently or in combination with one another. Accordingly, other implementations are within the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for fabricating a III-N device, comprising:
 - forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate;
 - forming a III-N barrier layer on the channel layer;
 - forming an insulator layer on the barrier layer; and
 - forming a trench in a first portion of the device, the forming of the trench comprising:
 - removing the insulator layer and a part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, wherein a remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device has a thickness away from a top surface of the channel layer, the thickness being within a predetermined thickness range;
 - annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device; and
 - removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein a portion of the trench that is through the barrier layer includes vertical sidewalls, and a portion of the trench that is through the insulator layer includes slanted sidewalls.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein forming the trench comprises exposing the top surface of the channel layer in the first portion of the device.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device comprises wet etching the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein removing the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device comprises dry etching the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device.
6. The method of claim 4, wherein the wet etching comprises chemically etching the III-N device in an alkaline solution.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein removing the insulator layer and the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device comprises:
 - removing the insulator layer in the first portion of the device by dry etching in a first gas ambient to expose a second top surface of the barrier layer; and
 - removing the part of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device by dry etching in a second gas ambient which is different from the first gas ambient.
8. The method of claim 7, wherein the insulator layer includes a silicon nitride layer and the barrier layer includes an aluminum gallium nitride layer, and wherein the first gas ambient includes SF_6 and the second gas ambient includes Cl_2 .
9. The method of claim 1, wherein the barrier layer includes an Al-based III-N layer that can be oxidized by the annealing, and the channel layer includes a III-N layer without Aluminum (Al) that is resistant to being oxidized during the annealing.

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10. The method of claim 1, wherein the predetermined thickness range is from about 3 nm to 10 nm.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the elevated temperature is between 300° C. and 700° C.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein forming an insulator layer comprises forming a first silicon nitride layer by metal organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD) as the insulator layer, the method further comprising:

before forming the trench, forming a second silicon nitride layer by plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) as an etch mask layer; and

after removing the oxidized remaining portion of the barrier layer in the first portion of the device, removing the etch mask layer from the insulator layer by wet etching in an acid solution.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising forming a gate insulator at least partially in the trench, wherein the gate insulator is formed on the top surface of the channel layer in the first portion of the device.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein forming the gate insulator comprises depositing an amorphous aluminum silicon nitride ($\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$) film in the trench, wherein x is an aluminum fractional composition of the amorphous aluminum silicon nitride film and y is a silicon fractional composition of the amorphous aluminum silicon nitride film.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein a thickness of the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film is between 1 nm and 60 nm.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein a ratio of the silicon fractional composition to the Al fractional composition y/x in the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film is less than $1/3$.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein depositing the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film comprises forming the amorphous $\text{Al}_x\text{Si}_y\text{N}$ film at a growth or deposition temperature higher than 500° C.

18. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

forming source and drain contacts electrically coupled to the channel layer; and

forming a gate electrode on the gate insulator at least partially in the trench between the source and drain contacts.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein forming the III-N barrier layer comprises forming the III-N barrier layer with a higher bandgap than the channel layer, such that a conductive channel is induced in the channel layer; and

forming the source and drain contacts comprises forming respective ohmic contacts for the source and drain contacts that are electrically coupled to the conductive channel.

20. A method of fabricating a device, comprising:

providing a second III-N layer on a first III-N layer, the second III-N layer comprising aluminum as a group-III element, the first III-N layer comprising gallium or indium but not aluminum as a group-III element;

providing an insulator layer on the second III-N layer; and forming a trench in a first portion of the device, the forming of the trench comprising:

removing the insulator layer to expose a portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device;

annealing the device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device; and

removing the oxidized exposed portion of the second III-N layer and exposing a top surface of the first III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein oxidizing the exposed portion of the second III-N layer causes the second III-N layer

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in the first portion of the device to be oxidized all the way to an interface between the second III-N layer and the first III-N layer but does not cause any of the first III-N layer to be oxidized.

22. The method of claim 20, further comprising forming an electrode in the trench.

23. The method of claim 22, further comprising forming a second insulator layer prior to forming the electrode, wherein the second insulator layer is between the electrode and the top surface of the first III-N layer in the trench.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the electrode is a gate electrode, a conductive channel is induced adjacent to an interface between the first and second III-N layers due to a compositional difference between the first and second III-N layers, and the method further comprises forming a source electrode and a drain electrode, the source and drain electrodes being on opposite sides of the gate electrode and being electrically coupled to the conductive channel.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the conductive channel is depleted of mobile charge below the trench when 0V is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source electrode, but becomes populated with mobile charge when a sufficiently positive voltage is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source electrode.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein the electrode includes an extending portion which extends over the insulator layer towards the drain electrode.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the second insulator layer includes an extending portion that is between the extending portion of the electrode and the insulator layer.

28. The method of claim 20, further comprising partially removing the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device after the removing of the insulator layer in the first portion of the device but prior to the annealing of the device, causing a remaining portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device to have a first thickness which is less than a second thickness of portions of the second III-N layer that are on opposite sides of the trench.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein the first thickness is between 3 nm and 10 nm.

30. A method of fabricating a nitrogen polar III-N device, comprising:

providing a III-N material structure comprising a second III-N layer on a first III-N layer, the second III-N layer comprising aluminum as a group-III element, the first III-N layer comprising gallium or indium but not aluminum as a group-III element;

providing a mask layer on an N-face of the second III-N layer in a second portion of the device but not in a first portion of the device, such that the second III-N layer is exposed in the first portion of the device but not in the second portion of the device;

annealing the device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device; and

removing the oxidized exposed portion of the second III-N layer in the first portion of the device, thereby exposing a top surface of the first III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

31. The method of claim 30, wherein the top surface of the first III-N layer is an N-face of the first III-N layer.

32. The method of claim 30, further comprising providing a third III-N layer on an opposite side of the first III-N layer from the second III-N layer, wherein a compositional difference between the first III-N layer and the third III-N layer

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causes a conductive channel to be induced in the first III-N layer adjacent to an interface between the first and third III-N layers.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising forming a gate electrode over the second portion of the device and forming a source contact electrically coupled to the conductive channel in the first portion of the device, wherein the second III-N layer is sufficiently thick to ensure that the conductive channel is depleted of mobile charge in the second portion of the device when 0V is applied to the gate electrode relative to the source contact.

34. The method of claim 33, further comprising removing the masking layer from the second portion of the device prior to forming the gate electrode.

35. A method for fabricating a III-N device, comprising:
 forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate;
 forming a second III-N barrier layer on the channel layer;
 forming a III-N etch stop layer on the second III-N barrier layer;
 forming a first III-N barrier layer on the III-N etch stop layer;
 forming an insulator layer on the first III-N barrier layer; and
 forming a trench in a first portion of the device, the forming of the trench comprising:
 removing the insulator layer in the first portion of the device, wherein a portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device has a thickness away from a top surface of the III-N etch stop layer, the thickness being within a predetermined thickness range;

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annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device; and

removing the oxidized portion of the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device.

36. The method of claim 35, further comprising extending the trench into the first III-N barrier layer prior to the annealing of the III-N device.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the extending of the trench into the first III-N barrier layer comprises etching part way through the first III-N barrier layer in the first portion of the device.

38. The method of claim 35, wherein the III-N etch stop layer includes a III-N layer without Aluminum (Al), and the first III-N barrier layer includes an Al-based III-N layer.

39. A method of forming a III-N device, comprising:
 forming a III-N channel layer on a substrate;
 forming a III-N barrier layer on the channel layer;
 forming a III-N etch stop layer on the III-N barrier layer;
 forming a p-type III-N layer on the III-N etch stop layer;
 forming a mask layer on the p-type III-N layer in a first portion of the device; and
 forming a trench in a second portion of the device, the forming of the trench comprising:
 annealing the III-N device in a gas ambient including oxygen at an elevated temperature to oxidize the p-type III-N layer in the first portion of the device; and
 removing the oxidized portion of the p-type III-N layer in the first portion of the device.

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